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The area of research for my study was how educational leaders impact school culture, specifically in the area of fostering positive teacher-student relationships in middle schools. Relationships between teachers and students can have a substantial impact on the development of a child. Teachers with strong relationships with their students have fewer discipline issues and higher levels of academic achievement among students. In my study, I sought to examine how principals, assistant principals, and curriculum facilitators help develop positive student-teacher relationships in their middle schools. Additionally, I wanted to learn culturally responsive strategies that school leaders use to help teachers form positive relationships with their students.

For my basic qualitative research study, I conducted in-depth interviews with 9 school leaders (3 principals, 3 assistant principals, and 3 curriculum facilitators). I conducted a follow-up interview with the principals with specific questions related to culturally responsive practices. By conducting a basic qualitative study, I wanted to examine the perspectives and worldviews of people involved. During my study, I focused on collecting data that would answer my research question, "*What do school leaders do to foster positive teacher-student relationships with middle school students?*" I used a culturally relevant lens and framework to develop the interview protocol and to analyze data from my findings. My data collection included recorded interviews with the participants and analysis of documents.

The participant data showed common themes about the roles of school leaders in fostering teacher-student relationships with middle school students. Participants asserted that all school leaders should model how to build relationships, provide focused feedback, and support teachers instructionally. School leaders who participated in the study also provided specific intentional strategies that they have used to help teachers build relationships with their students. Participants also described strategies that they recommended to their teachers. School leaders advocated that teachers participate in self-reflection, care about their students, use strategies to build relationships, engage students through instruction, and provide academic support for their students. School leaders should also work in cohesion with teachers in order to foster teacher-student relationships.

The study concludes with implications, guidelines, and recommendations for future research. From this study's findings, I developed the **Practical Guidelines: Teacher-Student Relationships Protocol** which is a tool for school leaders to use to help teachers build relationships with their students. From the strategies suggested by the study participants, I also developed the **Teacher-Student Relationship Strategies Toolkit** which provides relationship building strategies for teachers to use in conjunction with the protocol.

LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVELY FOSTERING POSITIVE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS IN MIDDLE SCHOOLS

by

Kenya Nakkia Smith

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Approved by

Craig Peck
Committee Chair

I dedicate this prose to my parents, Kenneth and Belinda Smith. I learned the values of strength, tenacity, perseverance, and scholarship from both of you. My dissertation is a subliminal symbol of earning your respect and showing gratitude for all the blessings, sacrifices, and encouragement from you both that has allowed me to achieve this level of academia. Daddy (RIP), this dissertation is my final academic testament! Ma, thank you for your companionship on this journey. I never could have made it without you . . .

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation, written by Kenya Nakkia Smith, has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair Craig Peck

Committee Members Jewell Cooper

Carl Lashley

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> I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people that have set themselves against me round about. —Psalm 3:6

The above bible verse resonates with me. Other than the fact that this is the bible verse that my sorority sisters and I chose to represent our journey together in sisterhood, I often thought of the verse during my academic pursuit at UNCG. Through this process, I have learned to turn fear into focus, procrastination into progress, doubt into diligence, and excuses into execution.

A mindset shift allowed me to complete this process. I was determined to finish what I started by any means necessary. An accomplishment of this undertaking would have not been attainable without a community of support.

> There is no magic to achievement, it is really about hard work, choices, and persistence . . . —Former First Lady Michelle Obama

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The poem below is a testament of how I achieved this major accomplishment . . .

I Believe in You

Dreams are powerful . . .

But every goal has a price tag.

There's research to be done,

Studying to do, and

Practice, practice, practice.

The best way to attain any desire is

Pay the full price

Do the work and your reach your goals.

—Gene Perret (adapted)

Carpe Diem . . . and never look back!

Assistant Principal Kenya Nakkia Smith's Relationship Affirmation Statement:

Mission: To help students live the lives they dream . . .

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

#RelationshipsMatter

A while ago, I was able to view the reality television show, "School Pride." It is similar to the show "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition," but instead of a home makeover, the show features several school makeovers. Four celebrity hosts helped to renovate a school in 10 days. Each school received $2 million dollars for the repairs and renovations. An interesting twist was that the celebrity hosts recruit volunteers from the community to help with the renovations. There were thousands of volunteers who helped, along with the students and staff of the receiving school, with the renovations. The schools also received donations from Home Depot, Wal-Mart, Microsoft, and General Motors. Students and staff were taken on surprise field trips and the students were exposed to experiences they never had before, like attending a major league baseball game. After the renovations, there was a sense of pride due to the physical change of the learning environment. The hosts returned to the schools after 4 months and there were reports from the school leaders of each of the schools of high morale, increasing test scores, and positivity in the school community post-renovation. I believe this stemmed from the collegial relationships that formed through the renovation process; it served as an underlying quest to bring a school's vision to reality. The show appealed to emotions

because one could see how the entire community working together helped to transform a school.

In looking at the show from a leadership standpoint and culturally responsive lens, every school in America needs what this show provided—strong leaders, community support, funding and resources, and positive public relations. The major drawback is that only seven schools were able to receive this gift. As a culturally responsive leader, a reality show should not be the force behind bringing a community together. The community support given to the school for the reality show should be the norm. Imagine if all schools in America received a visit from the four celebrity hosts, had thousands of volunteers in the community vested in the school consistently, and was given $2 million dollars for repairs and donations from major corporations for resources.

Now back to reality . . .

My Reality

I have worked at schools that had a toxic culture. There was no school spirit, low test scores, disgruntled staff, high suspension rates, and a lack of parent involvement. One year, I processed over 275 discipline referrals for my grade level. On the other hand, I have worked at schools where the school culture was extremely positive. Students were involved in many extracurricular activities, there was growth in data proficiencies in all subject areas, motivated staff, low suspension rates and high levels of parent involvement.

My reality is that in all of the schools in which I have served as a school leader, the majority of the conflict that I have helped to resolve had to do with people issues—

people not getting along, people having power struggles, people unwilling to help each other, and people's lack of understanding and empathy for others. I served as a listening ear, problem-solver, confidante, mentor, and reflection tool for teachers, parents, and students, as my main role the majority of the time was to function as a facilitator. Conflict is unavoidable in any organization, but an organization with a positive culture helps to minimize issues due to the intentionality of all stakeholders to develop and maintain positive relationships. An important aspect of school culture is teacher and student relationships. In my study, I seek to examine how school leaders such as principals, assistant principals, and curriculum facilitators develop and sustain teacher and student relationships. During my immersion into the school cultures at the various schools where I have served as a school leader, I came to believe whole-heartedly that **#RelationshipsMatter**.

Statement of the Problem

From the literature, we know that teachers play a significant role in the lives of children. The factors that influence how students connect to their schools include relationships with teachers and their levels of participation within the school community (McHugh, Horner, Colditz, & Wallace, 2013). Positive relationships can develop when all stakeholders show substantial and sustainable respect for each other and work together so that all parties are successful. Students and teachers develop relationships that can either cause a student to become engaged or disengaged in the learning process (McHugh et al., 2013). There must be a feeling of trust and mutual respect between all stakeholders in order for everyone to be successful. All of these factors contribute to establishing

positive teacher-student relationships. However, there is little information in existing research about how school leaders can help teachers build relationships with students. What is needed is a study that illustrates what school leaders do to help nurture positive teacher-student relationships with middle school students.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research study was to investigate how school leaders help teachers develop relationships with middle school students. I was interested in exploring this topic from the perspectives of middle school leaders. School leaders have a direct influence on the culture of schools, and as such, their perceptions merit attention.

Research Question

My research question was, "*What do school leaders do to foster positive teacher-student relationships with middle school students?*" I have a passion for building relationships with all stakeholders because I believe that it takes a team effort for everyone to become successful.

Background Context

The area of research for my study was how educational leaders impact school culture, specifically in the area of fostering positive teacher-student relationships. Relationships between teachers and students can have a substantial impact on the development of a child. Teachers with strong relationships have been shown to be more effective in their teaching roles. Teachers with strong relationships with their students have lower discipline issues and higher levels of academic achievement among students (Kirby Hall School, 2017; Morganett, 1991). In my study, I sought to examine how

principals, assistant principals, and curriculum facilitators help develop positive student-teacher relationships in their schools. Below, I provide a brief background into each of the core elements of my study: the nature of positive teacher-student relationships and the roles that principals, assistant principals, and curriculum facilitators play in creating positive teacher-student relationships.

Teacher-Student Relationships

As I discuss in more detail in my literature review in Chapter II, previous scholars have examined the nature and effects of positive teacher-student relationships. For example, in a classic study, Morganett (1991) focused on how teacher educators need to understand the importance of developing positive teacher-student relationships in courses and included specific examples of how to improve these relationships. Morganett stated that one element of developing good teacher-student relationships involved teachers communicating that they care about students personally and academically. When people feel that others care about them, they are more likely to be cooperative and less likely to do things to make the teacher's life difficult. Teachers can show they care about their students by taking time to talk and listen to students individually and collectively. Some examples include talking and listening to students through small group discussions, student reactions to current events, discussion at informal times such as lunch and class transitions, or conversations through soft reprimands that are administered quietly and privately to students who exhibit inappropriate behavior.

Morganett (1991) believes that another element of developing good teacher-student relationships is making the extra effort necessary to help students learn. This can

happen in various ways. Teachers can establish a learning environment to make students comfortable with asking for assistance and the help will be available. Teachers can establish an environment in which mistakes and questions are a normal part of the learning process and that it is acceptable to admit mistakes. Teachers can provide help by intentionally setting aside class time to work individually with students. Teachers can also identify peer tutors who can provide assistance as well. When students perform better academically, they feel better about themselves and teacher-student relationships improve.

Morganett (1991) identified creating a classroom environment that is supportive and helps students feel like they belong and are accepted as the third element in developing good teacher-student relationships. Students are more likely to participate in a classroom that is supportive and helpful. Increased participation enhances the chances for learning and lessens the opportunities for unacceptable behavior. A supportive classroom is established when a teacher recognizes that a student is trying and reinforces positively when students are behaving appropriately. Teachers have to communicate that put-downs and negative comments are not tolerated and address this behavior immediately. Teachers also build supportive environments when student have cooperative learning activities. Teachers who take the time to help students feel included in the learning environment enhance teacher-student relationships by showing care and concern for students' needs.

Similarly, the Educational Endowment Foundation (2019) recently published a report titled *Improving Behaviour in Schools,* which suggests that understanding

individual students, training teachers in classroom management, and having a consistent school-wide behavior management system will help to support positive student behavior. The report outlined six recommendations for preventing and responding to student misbehavior:

1. Schools should use simple approaches such as greeting students at the door as a part of the regular school routine.
2. Schools should focus on the importance of developing good relationships with students so that teachers know and understand them as individuals.
3. Schools should teach learning behaviors in collaboration to managing misbehavior.
4. Schools should use targeted approaches to meet the needs of individuals in schools.
5. Schools should use classroom management strategies to support good classroom behavior.
6. Schools should create consistency and coherency throughout the entire school.

The Chief Executive of the Education Endowment Foundation, Sir Kevan Collins, explained that the report revealed that consistent approaches to behavior can lead to strong relationships between teachers and students and form the foundations for learning.

The Principal's Role in Fostering Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

The principal influences and motivates the staff as well as creates or redevelops a school's culture. The principal's personality traits, attitudes, and beliefs have an important influence on the school's culture. It is important that the principal develops a

skillset to appropriately read and assess the current culture as well as the ability to reinforce or reshape it in order to maintain a conducive learning environment (Deal & Peterson, 1993).

The relationships within a school that promote a cohesive learning environment and learning community begin with school leadership and staff members and filter down to the students (Henderson & Mires, 2011). School principals foster positive relationships in schools in various ways such as developing teacher and student leaders and maintaining open lines of frequent communication with stakeholders via school newsletters and websites, establishing an open-door policy, and maintaining high visibility throughout the school day.

School principals also foster relationships by intentionally focusing on increasing and maintaining staff morale. One way to improve staff morale is to build the capacity and nurture the talent of staff members by asking them to share instructional strategies and best practices that work in their classrooms during professional developments (Henderson & Mires, 2011). According to Henderson and Mires (2011),

> The process of building lasting collaborative relationships within the community, school, and families continuously evolves each day. Leadership, communication, staff morale, and structural improvements are four factors along with collaboration, teamwork, and effort that we have found stimulate the lasting, learning community that builds student achievement and creates a positive school environment. (p. 65)

Henderson and Mires (2011) also suggest the following strategies to improve staff morale:

- Focusing on school pride through branding of t-shirts, window decals, etc.
- Hosting teacher appreciation luncheons and socials.
- Posting hall greetings and inspirational messages in classrooms and hallways for all to see.
- Creating structural improvements (new furniture, colorful murals) to create a positive learning environment.

The Assistant Principal's Role in Fostering Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Due to the increasing mandates from federal, state, and local authorities, the roles and responsibilities of the assistant principal have evolved. A key change agent in the middle school level is the assistant principal. Traditionally, assistant principals were viewed as building managers and disciplinarians who represented order, consistency, and behavioral support. Assistant principals also have responsibilities in the following areas: selection and evaluation of personnel, curriculum and instructional work, committee work, and faculty relations. The assistant principal's role must move from passive to active in an effort to create effective schools (Holmes, 1999). The assistant principal's actions must provide for growth of students, teachers, parents, staff, community, and the district. The assistant principal must enhance the principal's vision, mission, and academic leadership, as well as deal with the day-to-day management effectively. It is now important that assistant principals not only are school managers, but effective instructional and cultural leaders as well.

Assistant principals need to understand how governance works in order to make effective leadership decisions. Holmes (1999) reveals that

> Governance is the process of deciding and executing decisions through legal and administrative authority in management of schools. It is the process that involves students, teachers, staff members, administrators, the community, and external agencies in establishing policies and goals. These decisions establish, sustain, enhance, and protect student achievement. (p. 13)

The assistant principal has a complicated, multidimensional role that is required to cultivate a shared vision, understand goals, and promote the school's mission.

Historically, assistant principal responsibilities have mainly consisted of handling student discipline and allocated time to curriculum and staff development issues. Today, educational leaders need to be prepared to address social justice issues, especially in schools with marginalized student populations (Carpenter, Bukoski, Berry, & Mitchell, 2017). There is an increased demand in the area of educational leadership on how leadership is prepared to deal with social justice issues due to the changing social systems and school cultures. Theoharis (2010) defines social justice leadership as "principals who advocate, lead and keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically marginalizing conditions in the United States" (p. 93). Social justice leadership involved identifying and eradicating of unjust social practices and replacing those practices with equitable alternatives.

Carpenter et al. (2017) devised a case study in order to explore the role of assistant principals as social justice advocates in the era of high stakes testing and accountability. The study explored the social justice identities of 12 assistant principals in an urban, Midwestern city. The researchers found that all assistant principals in the study claimed a social justice identity. Additionally, the findings from the study indicated that the assistant principal's attitude, motivation, and stance towards social

justice work affected practices and policy in tangible ways including interactions with students, parents, and teachers, professional development opportunities, and instructional and disciplinary practices. Carpenter et al. (2017) implied that future research should seek to develop social justice theory specific to the assistant principal position and view various situations from a social justice standpoint.

The Curriculum Facilitator's Role in Fostering Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Coaching is a systematic approach to improving student learning. It has many purposes and practices. The entire role of the coach (activities, coach's schedule, the connections, and working relationship with adults in the building) is targeted at strengthening school culture and instructional practice. Trach (2014) stated,

> Effective instructional coaching requires well-tuned relationships and dynamic conversations between principals and teachers that result in professional renewal. The goal is to build teacher capacity, thereby improving individual educators, instructional teams, and the entire school over time. In the process, educators work together to analyze patterns, with the coach providing meaningful feedback to help teachers sustain instructional growth. The coaching relationship is both transformational and reciprocal, benefitting the coach and teacher alike. Instructional coaching is an authentic instructional relationship, where each partner is professionally transformed and ultimately renewed each time they engage with one another about teaching and learning. (p. 13)

Many schools are hiring "coaches" and are using them in schools in a variety of ways that may or may not improve instruction.

There are several titles given to the coach which include the following: instructional support specialist, mathematics or literacy resource teachers, and curriculum specialists, among others. For the purpose of my research, I will refer to school-based

instructional coaches as curriculum facilitators, or CFs. This person performs a multitude of duties in the school which may include performing model lessons, coordinating testing materials, handling lunch and bus duty, assisting the principal, data analysis, working with small groups of students who may be failing, and helping teachers to improve their instructional practice (Saphier & West, 2009).

When the role of the curriculum facilitator is clearly defined and implemented, their work as coaches can have powerful effects. Saphier and West (2009) explained that the job of a school-based curriculum facilitator is to raise the quality of teaching and learning in every classroom by establishing a culture where teaching is the focus among professionals, planning for instruction is collaborative, and discourse and questions about improving students' results are constant and non-defensive. Hall and Hord (2006) stated, "When building a dynamic learning culture is the focus, schools get better achievement from students" (p. 46). The curriculum facilitator is an important person to become a change agent in improving instruction because they have the only position designed to have immediate and constant access to every classroom and teacher in the building, as well as the ability to focus primarily on improving instruction and student learning. Curriculum facilitators work side by side with teachers to improve instruction on all aspects of the instructional core.

The role of the curriculum facilitator should be seen as a change agent and culture builder for the professional learning of the adults in the building. Wolpert-Gawron (2016) stated, "Instructional coaches can only be change agents when they have the support of administration on their side" (p. 59). In order for curriculum facilitators to be

successful in their role, they must have a working relationship with the principal that is focused on improving the instructional practices of adult learners with ideas on how each other play a part in building the culture and supporting each other through the process (Saphier & West, 2009). Curriculum facilitators are a unique stakeholder in today's schools because they get to celebrate teachers, embrace pedagogy, and share their learning with others. However, curriculum facilitators are often underused. By supporting them and clearly defining their role, schools can make major strides toward improvement.

Summary of Background Context

The specific area I studied in the educational field was how school leaders helped teachers establish and develop positive relationships with students. In this study, the term "school leaders" refers to research participants who have the principal, assistant principal, or curriculum facilitator position in a middle school. My research shows further evidence that school leadership has a direct impact on the school's culture. The relationships that teachers have with their students are direct indicators of whether a school has a positive or negative school culture.

Brief Description of Methods

The following description outlines my research methodology for this study. I conducted a basic qualitative research study (Merriam, 2002) involving nine school leaders (three principals, three assistant principals, and three curriculum facilitators) of middle schools to inquire about the strategies they use to foster teacher-student relationships. I conducted follow-up interviews with the principals with specific

questions related to culturally responsive practices. I interviewed school leaders to gain their perspectives regarding what they do to foster positive teacher-student relationships. The research settings were public middle schools that serve grades 6-8; I intended to interview leadership teams at the schools. I interviewed three leadership teams (principal, assistant principal, and curriculum facilitator) at three middle schools; however, in order to protect participant anonymity within the school-based teams, I report my findings without making reference to the teams or schools, but rather to individual school leaders.

I collected data through in-person, face-to-face interviews with the participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). After I collected my data, I conducted an interpretive data analysis (Creswell, 2016). Subsequently, I transcribed and coded each interview in order to determine the main themes that resonated across all of the interviews. In Chapter IV, I present my findings as several themes (full sentence statements) that emerged after I coded the data. In my final chapter, I analyze my findings using Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis' (2016) conceptual framework as an interpretive lens.

Conceptual Framework: Culturally Responsive Leadership

Culturally responsive and culturally relevant are terms that are close in meaning and both respond to the unique learning needs of minoritized students. I am relying on the term "culturally responsive school leadership" because it has been consistently used in educational leadership studies. The term was also chosen because the word "responsive" exudes an action-based and urgent aspect of the term, which is the ability of

school leaders to create school culture and curriculum that responds effectively to the educational, social, political, and cultural needs of students (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogies entered and would become dominant discourses on education and reform a few decades ago (Gay, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Gay (2010) believes that culturally responsive teaching alone cannot solve the major challenges minoritized students face. She highlighted the importance of reforming all aspects of the educational corporation, such as funding, policymaking, and administration in order for those areas to be culturally responsive. Gay (2010) suggested that if teachers should adjust their teaching practices in ways that effectively respond to children's learning and social needs in the classroom, then school leaders must have a similar mandate regarding the entire school's culture.

Educational reformers have emphasized that school leadership is a critical component to any education reform effort. Research suggests that good teachers will leave schools with ineffective leadership (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Developing effective leaders is an important part of the process of recruiting and retaining the best teachers for marginalized students. Effective leaders have to create and sustain an environment that will attract, maintain, and support the development of good teachers. An effective leader will also understand the need to recruit and retain culturally responsive teachers who are prepared to work with marginalized and minoritized students (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Culturally responsive leaders serve at multiple levels—from district leaders, to community members, and all in between. There has been an increasing amount of

research on the impact of teacher-leaders, community-led school leadership, and the impact that superintendents and other district administrators can have on educational and school reform (Khalifa et al., 2016). School-level leadership has a deep impact on instruction and student learning; school-level leaders are most knowledgeable about resources and are empowered by the district and state policy; and, school-level leadership is held the most accountable for progress, or lack thereof. Lastly, district level mandates are only effective to the extent that they are enforced locally (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Culturally responsive leadership addresses the cultural needs of the students, parents, and teachers. Culturally responsive leaders promote a school climate inclusive of minoritized and marginalized students and maintain a presence in the community they serve. They offer and lead professional development to ensure that teachers are continuously responsive to student needs. As demographics shift, leadership practices respond to the needs that accompany these shifts (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Culturally responsive leaders develop and support a school culture that is welcoming, inclusive, and accepting of minoritized students. Culturally responsive leaders recognize that minoritized students have been disadvantaged by oppressive structures and that educators and schools have been intentionally or unintentionally involved in reproducing this oppression. Culturally responsive leaders have a moral responsibility to counter this oppression (Khalifa et al., 2016). Khalifa et al. (2016) cite Cooper (2009) in stating that "Performing cultural work is much more involved and complex than advocating for it, for, although it does involve the advocacy, it also requires leaders to learn about each community they serve, and situate aspects of their schools so

they celebrate all cultures" (p. 1278). Like anti-oppressive, transformative, and social justice leaders, culturally responsive leaders challenge teaching practices and environments that limit marginalized students and will identify, celebrate, and protect the cultural practices of all students.

Khalifa et al. (2016) identified four major strands of culturally responsive school leaders based on their review of the literature. The first aspect of culturally responsive school leadership is critical self-awareness or critical consciousness. Culturally responsive school leaders should have an awareness of his/her self, values, beliefs, and dispositions when serving minoritized or marginalized students of color. Leaders must use this understanding to create a new environment of learning for children they serve and be aware of the inequitable factors that affects their students' potential.

A few of the behaviors of school leaders who critically self-reflect include the following:

- Is committed to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts;
- Uses equity audits to measure student inclusiveness, policy, and practices
- Uses school data and indicators to measure culturally responsive school leadership practices
- Leads with courage

The second aspect of culturally responsive school leadership is culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation in which school leaders articulate a vision that supports the development and sustaining of culturally responsive teachers. School leaders must recognize and challenge common patterns of inequities that lead to the

marginalization of urban youth. School leaders play a critical role in recruiting and retaining culturally responsive teachers, securing culturally responsive resources and curriculum, and offering professional development around culturally responsive teaching and leadership. School leaders must be willing to facilitate courageous conversations about race and culture, as well as develop strategies for developing teachers who are not, and may be resistant to becoming culturally responsive.

A few behaviors of school leaders who develop culturally responsive teachers include the following:

- Develop teacher capacity for culturally responsive curriculum
- Create culturally responsive PD opportunities for teachers
- Use school data to determine gaps in achievement, discipline, enrichment, and tutoring services
- Model culturally responsive teaching techniques, strategies, and practices

The third aspect of culturally responsive school leadership as described by Khalifa et al. (2016) is creating and sustaining culturally responsive and inclusive school environments. This includes the ability of a school leader to identify and foster a culturally affirming school environment. In the changing cultures of schools, critical consciousness and the ability to have courageous conversations are vital.

A few behaviors of school leaders that promote culturally responsive and inclusive school environments include the following:

- Building relationships and reducing anxiety among students

- Modeling culturally responsive school leadership for staff in building interactions
- Promoting a vision for inclusive instructional and behavioral practices.
- Encouraging student voice
- Challenging exclusionary policies, teachers, and behaviors

Lastly, the fourth aspect of culturally responsive school leadership is engaging students and parents in community contexts. It is important for school leaders to be able to engage students, families, and communities in culturally appropriate ways. School leaders play an important role in promoting school-community contexts, including native languages, structures that accommodates the needs of parents, and creating spaces for marginalized students' individual identities.

A few behaviors of school leaders who engage students, parents, and community contexts include the following:

- Develop meaningful positive relationships with community
- Are servant leaders
- Serve as an advocate and social activist for community-based causes in both the school and neighborhood community
- Use the community as an informative space to develop understandings of students and parents
- Connect directly with students
- Resist shortfall images of students and families

In the end, I used the ideas regarding culturally responsive leadership from Khalifa et al. (2016) as a conceptual framework to structure my study and help me analyze my findings.

Researcher Experience/Perspective and My Role in the Study

In my research, I investigated how school leaders help teachers build relationships with middle school students. I was interested in exploring this topic from the school leaders' perspective. School leaders have a direct influence on the culture of schools, and as such their perceptions are extremely important. I was interested in exploring the topic at the middle school level. I have been an assistant principal at the middle school level for the past 8 years, and the majority of the fires that I put out stem from conflict between students and teachers.

One of my many mentors advised me that the majority of issues that principals face are people issues. I hope that my completed dissertation will help educational leaders with teacher-student relationship issues, which can influence the culture of the school. I was intent on discovering common themes and threads and I was successful such that I present practical guidelines and strategies for educational leaders to use to foster and promote positive teacher-student relationships. I want the guidelines and strategies that I constructed through the execution of my study to help school leaders improve a school's culture that will ideally lead to high academic achievement. My hope is that, through my study's findings, I will be able to provide strategies for educational leaders and contribute to school culture reform through different facets of education such as strategic planning and transforming school cultures.

Significance of Study

The significance of this study is that I examined the perspectives of school leaders regarding how they foster positive teacher-student relationships. My study contributes to current research by providing guidelines and strategies that school leaders can use to help teachers build positive relationships with their students. Each school leader (principal, assistant principal, and curriculum facilitator) has different ways of interacting with teachers and students based on their positional roles in the school community. At the middle school level, teacher-student relationships are extremely important in maintaining a positive school culture due to nature of middle school and the changing demographics of school communities. From this study, I developed culturally relevant guidelines and strategies that educational leaders can use to help future educational leaders and stakeholders—including teachers, parents, and students—foster positive teacher-student relationships with middle school students.

Overview of Chapters

In Chapter I, I included an introduction to school culture, background information in the importance of positive teacher-student relationships, my research question, a brief description the basic qualitative research methodology, and brief description of the culturally responsive leadership framework that I used to analyze the data that I collected.

In Chapter II, I review the literature that relates to school leaders' role in fostering positive teacher-student relationships. The concepts of care, relatedness, warmth, and support emerged from the review of the literature as characteristics of teachers who have positive relationships with their students. Middle school students need extra attention

due to the impersonal structure of middle school. Finally, I explore culturally responsive teaching and leadership practices that are important for creating and sustaining positive school cultures and teacher-student relationships.

In Chapter III, I outline my basic qualitative research methodology, including my research question, settings, research participants, and data collection method and analysis strategies. Chapter IV includes my report of findings. In Chapter V, I analyze the findings and discuss implications of and recommendations from my research study. Specifically, I make recommendations regarding strategies that leaders can use to foster positive and productive teacher-student relationships in middle schools.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In my review of the literature, I considered numerous common factors directly related to the role of school leadership in fostering positive teacher-student relationships. My review of the literature further established what we already know about the topic and identified additional factors to explore. I have organized this chapter to present discussions of existing research related to three major related topics—school culture, teacher-student relationships, and culturally responsive educational practices.

School Culture

Effective Schools

One of the most prominent scholars on effective schools research, Ron Edmonds, submitted a rebuttal to Coleman's 1966 reports which stated that school had nothing to do with student achievement; family background was more important in ensuring the success of students in schools. Ron Edmonds, one of the founders of effective schools research, argued that the mastery of basic skills and equity was important in creating effective schools. The early findings from effective schools research include the following factors that contribute to a school's success: strong principal leadership, quality instructional programs, high expectations of students, and a structured and safe school environment. The Effective Schools Movement, which began in the 1970s and has expounded in the last 3 decades, suggested specific best practices to educate all students.

Several scholars such as Cohen (1983), Good and Brophy (1986), and Marzano (2003) had added several components to the original effective school characteristics, but evidently the tenets are the same as the Edmonds original model (as cited in Semel & Sadovnik, 2008).

In a more recent study conducted at five schools in New Jersey from 2005 to 2007, the findings supported the tenets of effective school literature (Semel & Sadovnik, 2008). The following themes from the study were found across all five schools: effective leadership by a principal or the school's head; stability in either the teachers or in the programs offered to children, including a majority of highly qualified teachers; strong ties to the community; teacher collaboration and the creation of a community of learners; high academic standards, high expectations, and strong accountability systems; strong administrative support for teachers; and parental involvement from very different parental communities. The researchers of this study concluded that all of these combined characteristics create a school culture of success where effective leadership is the key (Semel & Sadovnik, 2008).

Culture

Race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, language, social class, and faith are a few examples of factors that shape individual and group culture. Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (2009) define culture as "everything you believe and everything you do that enables you to identify with people who are like you and that distinguishes you from people who differ from you" (pp. 24–25). Özsoy and Uslu (2019) cite Parekh's (2002) definition of culture as "a system of beliefs and customs used in understanding,

arranging, and structuring the individual and collective lives of a group of people" (p. 38). Culture distinguishes a person or a group from others.

Schein (2010), as cited in Sabancı, Şahin, Sönmez, and Yılmaz (2017), defines culture in three levels: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions. Artifacts are visible and tangible and things that are noticeable about the organization when we enter it. Values are considered worthwhile and desirable and create guidelines for organizational behavior. Assumptions are beliefs about themselves and relationships with other members of the organization. When members of an organization share knowledge and assumptions, and they discover or develop ways of external adaptation and internal integration, an organizational culture develops (Sabancı et al., 2017).

Culture determines the quality of an organization and influences what happens within an organization. Culture has an influence on promotions, how careers are grown or derailed, and resource allocation. Cultures can have a positive or negative effect on a school's effectiveness. An effective leader creates a culture that positively influences all stakeholders (Sabancı et al., 2017).

Organizational Culture

Kilmann, Saxton, and Serpa (1986) define organizational culture as "the shared philosophies, ideologies, values, assumptions, beliefs, expectations, attitudes, and norms that knit a community together" (p. 89). According to Sabancı et al. (2017), there are several features that are themes in most definitions of organizational culture, including collective, holistic, historically determined, socially constructed, soft, and difficult to

change. Organizational culture also refers to ways of thinking, values, and ideas versus the concrete and visible part of the organization.

Sabancı (2017) cites Pheysey (1993) and Harrison (1972) and describes four types of organizational cultures: role, achievement, power, and support-oriented. Role culture emphasizes conformity to expectations and how the occupant of each position is expected to act. It is believed that people work effectively when then have a clearly defined task specific to their role. In achievement culture, people have a personal stake in getting work done. There are high demands of people's energy and time and the assumption is that people are enjoying and satisfied by the tasks. In a power culture, there are people who are dominant and others who are subservient. There is a social order based on habits and leadership is based on strength, justice, and authoritarian benevolence. In a support-oriented organization, member satisfaction comes from relationships; in other words, a sense of belonging and connections. The assumption is that people will contribute when they feel a personal connection or stake in the organization.

School Culture

School culture varies from school to school. School culture is the "inner reality" of schools that reflects the state of the learning environment (Deal & Peterson, 1993). Peterson (2002) states, "School culture is the set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the 'persona' of the school. . . . A school culture influences the ways people think, feel, and act" (p. 10). School culture is developed, fostered, and sustained by the school leaders. More recently, Fraise and Brooks (2015) stated that

> school culture is made up of formal and informal dynamics related to espoused and hidden curricula, instructional strategies, administrator-teacher-student interaction, language, communication, and policy development and implementation. It is both what happens during formal sessions in the classroom and what happens in the lunch room. But it is also about what happens at home, on the street corner, around policy makers' conference tables, and across the world. (p. 11)

Fraise and Brooks (2015) also stated that "Administrators and teachers, who develop their own espoused and actual cultures and sub cultures-influence these practices and cultural dynamics via their special formal authority in the system, a system they also participate in informally as discrete individuals" (p. 12). Students come to school with different and unique experiences. Since the dominant culture is overly represented in books and the curriculum, the vantage point from which each student views the "truths" that are depicted are different due to the cultural collision that happens in schools. It is important that leaders are responsive to students' views that they bring to the school and classroom environment.

School leaders have the task of creating a positive school culture that promotes learning for students and adults. When school leaders focus on creating a positive school culture, they work to create a sense of belonging and provide clear direction for students, teachers, parents, and community. For students, a sense of belonging can mean that they have developed a positive relationship with adults in the building. The sense of belonging can be felt in a school with a positive culture when their opinions are respected and valued in decision-making processes (Habegger, 2008). Teachers can feel a sense of belonging through the encouragement, professionalism, and success that the field of education gives them (Habegger, 2008). Parents may feel a sense of belonging when

principals communicate with them and express an interest in parental needs, questions, and concerns (Habegger, 2008).

A principal, teacher, and university researcher (Rhodes, Stevens, & Hemmings, 2011) developed a firsthand account of how a school culture was created in a brand-new urban public high school in Ohio. The high school would offer a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) career and college preparation pathway. There was an intentional effort made to create a positive school culture with a clear vision. Core values were developed that would create relational trust, a strong sense of community, and principal and teacher leadership. School structures infused into the culture further intensified the development of a positive learning community. Those social structures included the following:

- Collaborative team arrangements
- Professional development
- Student orientation and advisement
- Innovation instructional model
- Informal gathering places

Having a clear vision and values were important in the planning of the new high school. Values are the foundation of a school's organizational culture because they determine whether the members of the school community focus on teamwork or autonomy. They determine how everyday life in the halls, classrooms, and offices function.

Rhodes et al. (2011) recognized that positive school cultures are infused with norms that promote behaviors that Bryk and Schneider (2002) describe as relational trust.

"Relational trust is organized around relationships between teachers with students, teachers with other teachers, and teachers with parents and with their school principal" (Rhodes et al., 2011, p. 83). Everyone understands their role and there is respect, integrity, and personal regard for others. This forms a sense of community and a culture that promotes civility, respectful communication, and an openness for courageous conversations and thoughtful decision making.

The planners of the study realized that a positive school culture depends on a strong principal and teacher leadership. School leaders play an essential role in the development and maintenance of school cultures. Effective school leaders collaborate with stakeholders in the development of a shared vision driven by values. Effective school leaders are able to recruit and retain strong teachers and dismiss weak and incompetent ones. Teachers should be strong leaders in areas of curriculum and promote student achievement (Rhodes et al., 2011). At the study school, intentional organizational and social structures were implemented to make it possible for school leaders and teachers to meet on a regular basis, participate in decision making, learn together, collaborate on innovative instructional practices, and work closely with students. Social structures such as professional development that included team building, student orientation and advisory periods, and informal gathering places were important for community building and sustaining positive school culture.

A few lessons learned by Rhodes et al. (2011) on establishing a positive culture at a brand-new urban high school include the following:

- Having a discipline code at the onset includes state and local enforcement policies, but promotes core values and other aspects of positive culture
- Common planning time is important in creating and sustaining positive school culture
- Establish a strong parent support system
- Understand the social and educational power of the special features of the school (student orientation, advisory periods, etc.)

Positive and Negative Aspects of School Culture

One of the main tasks of school leaders is to promote a culture of high expectations. The major responsibility of school leaders is to "promote growth in student learning, manage their human capital, develop and support teachers, use data to drive student learning improvements, and build a culture of high expectations for adults and students, in the building" (Briggs, Cheney, Davis, & Moll, 2013, p. 15). A leader must be able to understand the attitudes, values, and perceptions of stakeholders in order to be able to intervene with the proper support (e.g., professional development for teachers or hiring of more minority teachers) (Teasley, 2017).

School leaders understand that "culture is rooted in relationships" (Chandler, 2004, p. 4). Relationships lead to emotional investments and capacity building that can shape school culture in positive ways. Teasley (2017) suggests that school principals have

> Ongoing discussion concerning the attributes and dynamics of the school's culture to include (a) patterns of professional and teacher-student interactions; (b) how planned events contribute and influence organizational culture; (c) the role that

> student populations, parents, and surrounding communities play to include the various backgrounds; and, finally, (d) how school culture influences student academic outcomes, approaches to discipline, and plans to make self-improvements. School based professionals should not leave organizational culture to chance because it exists and will flourish, whether by happenstance or planned or deliberate practices. (pp. 4–5).

Indicators of positive school culture include professional satisfaction, high morale, and creating an environment that accelerates student learning and fosters collegiality and collaboration among stakeholders (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013). Stakeholders engage in healthy and professional behaviors, promote collaborative decision making from stakeholders, and hold students to high standards, with the majority of students meeting those standards in a school with a positive culture. Leadership, teamwork, and intentional goal setting help to shape cultures in schools (Bush, 2015).

A school with a negative culture may have the following characteristics: low trust among stakeholders, low academic expectations, and resistance to change and collaboration (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013). A few more indictors of a negative school culture that would require a shift and change are poor teacher-student relationships, cultural bias, high levels of discipline disproportionality, lack of diversity of staff members that is not reflective of the student population, and disproportionate numbers of minority students in special education (Teasley, 2017).

School Leadership Influence on School Culture

The key to managing school culture is through school leadership (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). Effective school leaders recognize the needs of those within the organization and understand the inner workings of the organizational culture.

Additionally, effective principals understand that they have to incorporate their knowledge about culture when enacting change within their organizations and engaging in decision-making processes (Hollingsworth, Olsen, Asikin-Garmager, & Winn, 2017).

School leaders effectively develop positive school cultures in several ways. School leaders create positive school cultures by building trusting relationships. Good interpersonal relationships between stakeholders develop when the principal takes the time to get to know and understand them. Often the relationships are achieved through effective communication (Price, 2012). School leaders also use distributed leadership to develop positive school cultures. Distributed leadership is defined by Timperley (2005) as the "practice of developing and managing a school culture conducive to conversations about instruction by building norms of trust, collaboration, and academic progress among staff" (p. 3). Researchers such as Spillane (2005) and Timperley (2005) have concluded that distributing leadership is positively related to instructional changes and improvement efforts in schools.

With the intensifying focus on increasing academic achievement, many school leaders may forget that values play an essential role in educational organizations. Based on my experience, in the era of high stakes testing there has been an overemphasis on organizational policies and procedures without regard to the "softer" part of school organizations which are linked to people, school philosophy, values, and expectations. There has been a shift and interest in the "human" dimension of organizations, sometimes now referred to as communities, rather than organizations. Sergiovanni (2001) noted,

> Since the school has become a community, the school leader can no longer afford to use only a traditional hierarchical and bureaucratic approach but instead he/she needs to reinforce a cultural, symbolical, values-driven leadership, which seeks to the welfare of all school members. (p. 105)

Educational leadership is shifting from a "command and control" means of administration to an approach where individual contributions are recognized at the school and human relations are at the forefront (Deenmamode, 2012; Hoy & Miskel, 1996). The sharing of common values and beliefs develop through the unique contributions of each individual in the school. Principals must understand that there has to be alignment between an individual's personal system of values and beliefs and the values and beliefs of the organization. Over time, the values transform into unconscious ways of behaving and interacting with each other and become a part of the organization's culture (Deenmamode, 2012).

When stakeholders feel comfortable and at home within the school culture, there is a positive impact on the achievement of students (Kelly et al., 1998). The comfortable feeling that leads to a productive learning environment stems from purposeful and regular face-to-face communication with school leaders (Fiore, 1999). Stakeholders need to know that they are the school leader's priority. When stakeholders feel important, they become productive members of the school community. Schools that have the healthiest school cultures have a sense of community among stakeholders (Fyans & Maehr, 1990).

If school leaders intend to influence the culture of their schools, they must be willing to extend beyond self and connect with the members of the school community. "Principals of schools with more positive school cultures choose to be visible members of

the larger school community" (Fiore, 2000, p. 12). More school leaders have intentionally recognized the importance of having the support of all of the members of the school community to build cultures rich with student achievement, staff morale, positive teacher-student relationships, and support from community members (Fiore, 2000).

Teacher-Student Relationships

Teacher-student relationships are important for several reasons. Teacher-student relationships have an influence on student transition and adjustment to school and peer relationships and they also affect the learning process (Gladys, Changilwa, & Gordon, 2016). There have been many studies on teacher-student relationships and how those relationships support academic achievement, school engagement, self-esteem, and general socioemotional wellbeing (Gladys et al., 2016). Gladys et al. (2016) state that "positive teacher-pupil relationships are necessary for effective teaching and learning and contribute to pupils' school adjustment, including socio-emotional, behavioral, and academic functioning" (p. 62).

Internal and External Factors Affecting Teacher-Student Relationships

There are several internal and external factors affecting youth that present challenges in the educational setting.

> Vulnerable youth, both those disadvantaged due to historical (e.g., racial and ethnic minorities) and socioeconomic (e.g., those from low income, low parental education households) factors, face a number of economic and sociopolitical risk factors, such as underfunded schools and the exclusion of their families from decision-making processes related to educational quality. (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 10)

Students who possess economic and sociopolitical risk factors are subject to lower academic achievement and higher dropout rates (McHugh et al., 2013). In order to help combat these associated risks, students need to feel a connection to their schools in order to succeed academically, despite the many internal and external factors they face.

The factors that influence how students connect to their schools include relationships with teachers and their levels of participation within the school community (McHugh et al., 2013). Many researchers have sought to understand the underlying reasons that lead to school withdrawal or failure. Catalano, Haggerty, Osterle, Fleming, and Hawkins (2004) believe that "encouraging youth outcomes appears to depend on both positive relationships with school-based peers and adults *and* a commitment to the school" (as cited in McHugh et al., 2013, p. 10). There was also further evidence of the two school connection components (relationships with teachers and participation/ identification with school) through a study conducted by McNeely (2005). McNeely found that school connectedness consisted of two unique factors—student perceptions of the quality of teacher relationships, and a sense of school belonging. When tested, the power of the teacher-student relationship was a strong predictor of adolescent outcomes (McNeely, 2005). When teachers and students have strong relationships with teachers and have a connection to the school, students perform better academically.

All stakeholders must establish positive relationships in order for students to achieve academically. Wilder (2000) states that "students are more likely to persist in school when they are either academically or socially integrated with teachers and other students during the learning process" (p. 209). Students must make a connection to the

learning environment through relationships with others. Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain (2005) state that "academic achievement at any point is a cumulative function of current and prior family, community, and school experiences" (p. 422). Teachers have the power and influence to alter students' perceptions of school experiences. "A student who feels comfortable in the classroom and when interacting with teachers may strive harder in school work, become more involved in class activities, and realize greater educational gains" (Voelkl, 1995, p. 127). If students are comfortable in the educational setting, they will perform better academically.

Factors such as teacher experience, education, and class size can have a direct impact on student achievement, the culture of the school, and the development of teacher-student relationships (Rivkin et al., 2005). Rivkin et al. (2005) explain that "the body of research that observed teacher characteristics including experience and education explain little of the variation in student achievement" (p. 419). There are many unobservable and unmeasurable factors to consider, such as the teacher-student relationship, in relation to how students perform academically.

> In the classroom, a student's relationship with the teacher can foster academic value systems, sustain long-term engagement, and inform enduring self-appraisals the students will form of him or herself as a learner (Connell & Welborn, 1991; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991). (McHugh et al., 2013, p. 12)

Interpersonal relationships are an important part of helping students to engage in academics. Students and teachers develop relationships that can either cause a student to become engaged or disengaged in the learning process (McHugh et al., 2013).

Teacher Behaviors That Contribute to Positive Relationships

There are many behaviors that teachers exhibit to develop positive teacher-student relationships. Gladys et al. (2016) state that "positive teacher-student relationships are characterized by mutual acceptance, understanding, warmth, closeness, trust, respect, care, and cooperation" (p. 62). The key behaviors of care, relatedness, warmth, and support are explored in the following sections.

Care. Care is an important component of positive teacher-student relationships. Relational care, as defined by Noddings (2012),

> involves two individuals—the carer and the cared-for. The carer takes time to listen to the expressed needs of the cared-for, reflect on the expressed needs, and take action to address the identified needs. To complete the caring act, the cared-for demonstrates that care has, in fact, been received. With regard to the classroom, the caring act can take place between teacher and student, student and student, as well as from student to teacher. (p. 223)

Teachers can show their students that they care in a variety of ways. Some of those ways include addressing the unique needs of each learner, helping students to meet their personal goals, and helping students develop a sense of belonging (Cassidy & Bates, 2005).

A study conducted by Nowak-Fabrykowski and Caldwell (2002) titled "Windows of Care" focused on developing a caring attitude with beginning early childhood educators. The beginning teachers reflected on their own experiences with care and caring teachers by identifying keys elements that the beginning teachers thought to be indicative of care. For the beginning teachers in the study, caring meant helping others

and focused on the themes of care as outlined by Caldwell's (1999) previous work—student-oriented, work-oriented, able to engage students, and active.

Student-oriented care is defined by several characteristics. A participant in Caldwell's (1999) study believed that a student-oriented teacher displays respect through an appreciation for an individual's uniqueness. Student-oriented teachers develop respect in the classroom by modeling how to show respect and give compliments. A student-oriented teacher shows care for students by believing in them and by providing positive social interactions both within and outside the classroom (Caldwell, 1999). Student-oriented care can be demonstrated by providing positive feedback on assignments and through the use of behavior incentives. Lastly, student-oriented care is shown through active listening, open lines of communication, exerting patience, encouraging students to think outside the box, and providing students with endless opportunities and support for their mastery of learning objectives (Caldwell, 1999).

Work-oriented care is when teachers give students multiple forms of assessment to demonstrate mastery of a standard and by adjusting the workload if needed. Teachers focusing on work-oriented care are compassionate toward different ethnic backgrounds and are willing to adjust to match their students' diverse needs, as they know that some students do not live in an environment that allows them to complete all assignments according to stated criteria (Caldwell, 1999). Teachers who engage in work-oriented care are willing to give extra time on assignments. Caldwell (1999) stated, "A teacher who gives extra time for students to complete assignments shows that he or she cares by demonstrating flexibility and understanding" (p. 3). A teacher who is willing to change

classroom rules when necessary exhibits work-oriented care. Each group of students has their own personality and may require different sets of rules. According to Caldwell (1999), "The caring teacher incorporates behavior contracts, positive incentives, and rule adaptations to address the diverse demands of students" (p. 3). The caring work-oriented teachers provide opportunities for each student to be successful.≥÷

Another example of care is being able to engage students. Caring teachers engage students by becoming an expert in their content area. Other ways of developing deeper content knowledge include attending workshops and seminars, returning to school to obtain a graduate degree, collaborating with other teachers, and becoming self-reflective practitioners (Glasser, 1998). Teachers who engage students help them to become independent and reflective thinkers. When teachers provide open-ended problem-solving questions, they are enabling students to think independently and creatively (Caldwell, 1999). Providing opportunities for classroom discussion is another way that caring teachers engage their students. An effective strategy teachers can use is to spark classroom discussion by posing questions and inviting speakers into the classroom to activate discussions and spark interest and enthusiasm. Educators provide them autonomy over their learning by engaging students in cooperative learning (Glasser, 1998).

Caring teachers are active teachers—they are energetic, have a sense of humor, tell stories that use real-life examples, provide interesting assignments, and base grades on more than homework and tests (Caldwell, 1999). Developing an ethic of care in the classroom is a complex concept. "The four themes from Windows of Care demonstrate

the complexity of caring, which entails more that warm and fuzzy feelings" (Caldwell, 1999, p. 5). The four themes aid teachers in reflecting upon the ethic of care in the classroom in an effort to address the educational needs of students.

A student will determine if a teacher displays "*aesthetic care*, sentimental phrases with little to no action, [or] *authentic care*, actions that incorporate genuine consideration of the person being cared for and their capacities" (McHugh et al., 2013, p. 11). Another way students determine if an adult is supportive of them is if the adult provides resources that the students will need to achieve their goals. McHugh et al. (2013) state that "one of the primary perceived benefits of strong, positive relationships with teachers is continued motivational resources to persist in academically challenging experiences related to attaining academic goals" (p. 23). Authentic care is an element of developing positive teacher-student relationships that helps students achieve academically.

Student engagement is an example of an academic motivational resource, which serves as a gateway to learning and deters students from negative academic outcomes (Skinner, Pitzer, & Steele, 2016). Hughes, Luo, Kwok, and Loyd (2008) found in a 3-year longitudinal study that intentional engagement predicted changes in first graders who were academically at risk. Luo, Hughes, Liew, and Kwok (2009) found that academically at-risk students who displayed enthusiastic and cooperative engagement also showed growth in mathematics.

Skinner et al. (2016) argue, "Research indicated that the benefits of engagement extend to high school and beyond" (p. 2101). A few studies that have focused on students at the end of elementary school and the beginning of middle school suggest that

engagement may be an especially important resource over the transition to middle school. For example, in a 3-year study conducted in the same school year on eighth graders, Jang, Kim, and Reeve (2012) revealed that engagement predicted changes in their course achievement by the end of the semester. "The benefits of engagement seem to occur to students who differ on a wide variety of demographic and status indicator, including gender, race, and national origin" (Skinner et al., 2016, p. 2101).

In order for teachers to foster positive relationships with their students, they must exude academic care. In 2005, Nade devised the term *academic care* and described it as "helping students to develop positive self-esteem, and feelings of well-being and self-efficacy through the school's academic and organizational structures, and through adults' relationships with students" (as cited in Carr, 2016, p. 88). Teachers who exude academic care provide meaningful and purposeful learning experiences as well as foster students' socioemotional wellbeing. Carr (2016) suggests that "when students feel genuine and sustainable care from their teacher, they work harder academically, are more engaged, and spend more time on task, experience involvement in academic performance and overall development, and have more confidence to learn" (p. 88). Care is often listed as a quality of an effective teacher.

In a study about creating caring communities, Ellerbrock et al. (2015) developed eight characteristics of a caring educator through interviews and observations of teachers who identified how they showed care to their students. Ellerbrock et al. conclude that a caring educator establishes a safe and academic-focused classroom, creates shared norms and values, promotes open and honest communication, makes time for everyone to get to

know one another, facilitates mutual respect, encourages reciprocal care and mutual responsibility, demands academic excellence from students, and uses student-centered cooperative group structures. "Through meaningful relationships grounded in genuine care, educators nurture a responsive classroom environment that can help set the foundation for student success" (Ellerbrock et al., 2015, p. 51). It is essential that students receive care from their teachers.

Relatedness. Another aspect of positive teacher-student relationships is relatedness:

> Relatedness between students and their teachers has been demonstrated to predict students' emotional and behavioral engagement. . . . Additionally, the provision of emotional support, a Hallmark of feelings of relatedness, helps to sustain a [student's] engagement in the face of difficulties and adversity (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). (McHugh et al., 2013, p. 14)

If students' relational needs are not being met, they may resist the negative environment and teachers may view them as defiant (McHugh et al., 2013). A positive teacher-student relationship is needed for students to engage in learning activities and to perform well academically. The foundation upon which the development of engagement is built depends upon positive teacher-student relationships that are characterized by warmth, care, support, trust, and mutual respect.

There must be a sense of relatedness between the teacher and the student in order for positive relationships to develop. Relatedness can be seen through the connection made between the student and the teacher on an emotional level. Soo (2016) states that a sense of relatedness between the students and the teacher can include "feelings of

belonging, inclusion, acceptance, importance, and interpersonal support" (p. 23). Research by Soo (2016) suggests that a high sense of relatedness has been "linked to important academic outcomes, including self-efficacy, success expectations, achievement values, positive affect, effort, engagement, interest in school, task goal orientation, and school marks" (p. 24). A high sense of relatedness also leads to greater academic participation and engagement.

Warmth. In a study published in 1991, Robinson, Wilson, and Robinson explored students' ability to perceive warmth and empathy conditions in the classroom and whether their perceptions of the teachers' ability to provide these conditions affected student achievement (as cited in Voelkl, 1995). Although the study found a weak relationship between student warmth and academic achievement, there was a strong relationship between warmth and participation.

> Teachers who encourage students' work, listen to and show interest in students, and demonstrate care and respect for students may foster greater interest and participation in those students. The youngster who feels comfortable and accepted in school is likely to become more involved; this increased involvement may in turn lead to greater achievement. (Voelkl, 1995, p. 130)

Soo (2016) cites Harris and colleagues (2008), who found that "students who experience an accepting and warm relationship with their teachers will be more capable and motivated to comply with classroom rules and teacher expectations" (p. 25). The increased engagement in learning activities is expected to move students toward academic success.

Support. Students in McHugh et al.'s (2013) study identified support as an important factor in fostering positive teacher-student relationships. Students state that support from teachers took on various forms such as "giving them advice, helping them with learning tasks, and assisting with more abstract, global issues such as exploring possible goals and career options" (p. 22). Soo (2016) found that "extensive research demonstrates that when students perceive their teachers to be supportive and caring, they are more likely to engage in cooperative, responsible behavior and to adhere to classroom and school rules and norms" (p. 25). Developing caring and supportive relationships with students can help with encouraging positive student academic outcomes.

Teacher-Student Relationships with Middle School Students

One aspect of shaping a positive school culture is that principals foster collegiality and collaboration among stakeholders. One way that collegiality and collaboration is promoted in a school culture is through the school principal's implementation of strategies that foster positive teacher-student relationships. Effective school leaders recognize that teachers act as socializing agents who can influence a student's social and intellectual experiences (Davis, 2006). Teachers can instill values in students by motivating students to learn through classroom experiences, addressing students' need to belong, and by developing students' emotional, behavioral, and academic skills (Davis, 2006).

Adolescence is a developmental period when intimate relationships become important and when young people spend less time with family and more time with peers. (Ingram & London, 2018). The onset of adolescence causes rapid physical and emotional

changes brought on by puberty. There are also changes in relationships with their peers and parents. Peer relationships are extremely important to adolescents as they are trying to seek validation in a social unity beyond that of family (Szabo, 2019). Ingram and London (2018) reveal that it is important that school support students during adolescence, which is a vulnerable time in development. Middle school is a time when youth are sensitive to social challenges. Healthy social, emotional, and physical development are important in order for adolescents to have successful academic outcomes in a school setting.

Developing relationships presents challenges to many middle school teachers, even though supportive relationships with teachers play an important role. Middle schools are criticized for their impersonal structure and increased teacher-student ratios. Middle school students have reported feeling less competent and less supported by teachers (Davis, 2006). Davis (2006) states, "students generally reported feeling that their middle school teachers were less friendly, less supportive, and less caring than their elementary school teachers" (p. 194).

Even with the decline in the quality of teacher-student relationships, findings have also suggested that adolescents benefit both socially and academically when they experience supportive relationships with their teachers (Resnick et al., 1997). Davis's (2006) study indicated that "middle grades students who perceived their relationships with their teachers as supportive tended to report enhanced motivation, perceive more facilitative classroom cultures, and receive higher grades" (p. 194). The students in Davis, Schutz, Chambliss, and Couch's (2001) study found that they view their academic

performance differently regardless of whether they perceived they had a good relationship with their teacher.

The teachers in Davis's (2006) study believed that supportive relationships promoted academic learning motivation by creating a safe environment for students to express thoughts and feelings and take intellectual risks. Teachers felt like students "worked harder" for teachers they liked and the teacher felt they could push students to do more challenging work when they had a good relationship with their students (Davis, 2006). In this way, many of the teachers in the study found that investing time to develop supportive relationships with students "paid off" throughout the year by becoming a source of their own motivation to be creative in their instruction, to persist with challenging content, to re-teach units if necessary, and to work through conflict with students (Davis, 2006).

Culturally Responsive Educational Practices

Culturally Responsive Teaching

James Comer believed that no significant learning occurs without a significant relationship (Comer, 2001). As classrooms look significantly different than those from a decade ago in terms of race, ethnicity language, and socioeconomic level, teachers are challenged to meet the academic, cultural, and community needs of the students they serve. Research indicates that the success of today's professional educator may depend on the development of dispositions such as caring for others, sensitivity to student differences, fairness, and strength in decision making (Edwards & Edick, 2012).

According to Edwards and Edick (2012), “Culturally responsive teaching provides the pathway for teachers to connect with all students for academic success” (p. 2). This idea is supported by researchers such as Ladson-Billings (1992) and Gay (2010), who discuss and describe culturally relevant and responsive teaching practices. Culturally responsive teaching guarantees that educators engage students by teaching the subject matter in meaningful ways, connecting it to students’ lives (Villegas & Lucas, 2007).

The four principles of interaction, accommodation, ownership, and opportunity frame the process of how culturally responsive teachers form significant relationships with their students (Edwards & Edick, 2012). The four principles form a hierarchy and serve as building blocks for others. Interaction is followed by accommodation. Accommodation enables ownership to occur. When interaction, accommodation, and ownership are cohesive, opportunity is possible (Edwards & Edick, 2012).

Getting to know one’s students is important for effective teaching and learning to occur. Teachers must get to know their students, both academically and socially, for significant relationships to develop. A few examples of how teachers get to know their students are:

- Learning the names, interests, hobbies, and information about all students.
- Asking questions and listening to the answers without judgment.
- Using learning style inventories so that teachers will know student preferences for learning and designing lesson with respect to the learning styles.

- Interacting with families by extending academic invitations to help students with completion of assignments and activities (Edwards & Edick, 2012).

Culturally responsive teachers interpret and respond to behaviors by learning how the students see themselves by listening to the students and observing them closely (Edwards & Edick, 2012). Additional to interaction, accommodating a student's individual needs is a critical part of culturally responsive teaching. After getting to know students and their families, the next step in developing relationships with students is to design instruction and learning situations that will help them to succeed academically (Edwards & Edick, 2012). The teacher can capitalize on the knowledge, skills, and beliefs that individual students bring to the classroom if the teacher is able to see that differences exist and accept the realities of each student. Accommodation also means providing choice for students. Tomlinson (2005) suggests differentiating instruction to meet the needs of students by using flexible grouping and tiered activities that demonstrate learning through a variety of formative and summative assessments that provide data to assess student learning.

Students who feel their teacher knows them both academically and personally are now able to take ownership of their learning (Edwards & Edick, 2012). Edwards and Edick (2012) state that

> when students learn from each other through formal and informal means, they no longer view the teacher as the keeper of the knowledge, but as the facilitator who helps the students develop their own ideas of how to live in and transform their world, this developing independence rather the dependence. (p. 8)

Culturally responsive teachers encourage students to take ownership of their learning by implementing strategies such as cooperative groups (Padrón, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002).

Culturally responsive teachers design learning that builds upon students' cultures in order for the student to own the learning. Student motivation, parental beliefs about the role of the school, and student achievement are impacted by the students' ownership of their learning. Teachers must consider the cultural differences that may exist between home and school. Edwards and Edick (2012) suggest the following ways to integrate family and community into student learning:

- Additional to newsletters and school conferences, teachers can use surveys and assessment instruments to determine families' expectations of the teacher and school
- Touring student neighborhoods and gathering places to identify local resources to help teacher incorporate cultural knowledge into the classroom

In the era of high-stakes testing, if educators are not prepared to meet the diverse needs of students' racial, ethnic, and cultural groups, these matters move from personal to professional. Strained relationships and discourse in educational settings due to the focus on accountability only heighten the cultural conflicts when not recognized. This presents a problem for educational leaders who understand the importance of organizational cultures and how they inform the values and behavior of stakeholders they serve (Horsford, Grosland, & Gunn, 2011).

Culturally responsive pedagogy has arisen as an essential framework to consider in creating positive environments for youth that build on assets and take social contexts

into consideration (Ladson-Billings, 1994). The culturally responsive framework builds on students' experiences and knowledge to create engaging situations for learning and development (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Gay (2000) advises that culturally responsive teaching and responsive pedagogy should create settings that are comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, validating, and transformative. Research has shown that through culturally responsive teaching and responsive pedagogy, youth develop greater academic proficiency, cultural competency, and sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Ladson-Billings (1995) is one of the first educational theorists to have coined the term *culturally responsive teaching*, with the understanding that teachers meet three criteria: "an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness" (p. 483). A few best practices that embody this framework include engaging students to participate in learning that is meaningful to them, drawing upon students' cultural and social capital, as well as the prior knowledge that each student brings to the classroom, and facilitating the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness in students that helps them to examine the social and cultural norms and systems of oppression (Craven, McCormack, & Brinkley-Rubinstein, 2014).

Culturally responsive pedagogy is defined as a pedagogy that "empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 18). Culturally responsive pedagogy has also been referred to as culturally responsive teaching and instruction. This

type of instruction seeks to support students academically while sustaining their cultural identity. According to Ladson-Billings (1994), culturally responsive teaching is not a series of steps that teachers can follow or a recipe for being effective with African American students. Instead, culturally responsive teaching is a way of thinking in which teachers value the experiences and cultures of their students. Teachers know enough about students' cultures to adapt instruction to their needs. Culturally responsive instruction focuses on how the content is being delivered versus the actual content itself (Horsford et al., 2011).

In her book *The Dreamkeepers*, Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) identifies six tenets of culturally responsive teaching and the characteristics of culturally responsive teachers:

1. They have high self-esteem and high regard for others.
2. They see themselves as part of the community, they see teaching as giving back to the community, and they encourage their students to do the same.
3. They see teaching as an art, and themselves as artists.
4. They help students make connections among their community, national, and global identities.
5. They believe that all students can succeed.
6. They see teaching as "digging knowledge out" of students.

Students develop skills necessary for school and life success by examining the differences in the dominant culture and the students' own cultures through cultural referents in the curriculum. Teachers use their knowledge of students' cultures, prior

experiences, and learning styles to make learning appropriate for their students. One limitation of culturally responsive teaching is its failure to explicitly explore the concepts of power and privilege, White supremacy, and institutional racism. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) has specifically asked to keep issues of racism part of the curriculum in order for students to learn about different forms of oppression.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

As culture is ever changing, researchers and practitioners are evolving in new ways that require viewing culture differently. From the work of Shulman (1987), his notions of "content knowledge," "pedagogical knowledge," and "pedagogical content knowledge" have helped practitioners understand the different aspects of pedagogy. Giroux and Simon (1989) offered a different perspective on pedagogy in their plea for a "critical pedagogy that takes into consideration how the symbolic and material transaction of the everyday provide the basis for rethinking how people give meaning and ethical substance to their experiences and voices" (p. 237). Paris and Alim used the term *culturally sustaining pedagogy* to refer to a shift from focusing on one racial or ethnic group to consider the global identities that emerge from the arts, literature, music, athletics, and media (as cited in Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 82). The beauty of culturally sustaining pedagogy is the ability for teachers to take the dual responsibility of external performance assessments along with community-/student-driven learning.

The main goal of culturally sustaining pedagogy is to counteract deficit thinking. During the 1960s and 1970s, deficit approaches to teaching and learning viewed the cultural ways of being for many students and communities of color as deficiencies that

needed to be overcome. They only way to succeed in learning demanded and legitimized the dominant culture's language, literacy, and cultural ways of schooling. According to Paris (2012), "The dominant language, literacy, and cultural practices demanded fell in line with White, middle-class norms and positioned languages and literacies that fell outside those norms as less-than and unworthy of a place in U.S. schools and society" (p. 93). Paris also recognized that opportunities are afforded to those who are proficient in the dominant academic and social ways with oral and written language and other cultural practices.

It is quite possible to be relevant to something or responsive to it without ensuring its continuing presence in students' repertoires of practice (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). A new term was needed to embody past and present research while maintaining the cultural practices of students and extending students' repertoires of practice to include dominant language, literacies, and cultural practices. Paris (2012) offered the term *culturally sustaining pedagogy* because it,

> requires that our pedagogies be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people-it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence. (p. 95)

The main goal of culturally sustaining pedagogy is to perpetuate, foster, and sustain cultural pluralism as a part of the democratic nature of schooling.

Culturally Responsive Leadership

From an educational leadership perspective, Bustamante, Nelson, and Onwuegbuzie (2009) add to a growing body of research that emphasizes the importance

of attending to individual and group culture and examines how “culturally responsive educational leadership positively influences academic achievement and students’ engagement with the school environment” (p. 794). Thus, culturally responsive school leadership is key to cultivating a positive and respectful school culture for serving diverse students (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Using the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) Professional Standards for Educational Leaders as a guiding framework, Minkos et al. (2017) provide several strategies that culturally responsive leaders should use when leading diverse schools:

1. Effective school leaders understand students’ culture and context; they should build relationships with families in order to obtain history about a student’s educational history, culturally appropriate behaviors and language, and difference between home and school expectations.
2. Effective school leaders should recognize and respect students’ strengths, diversity, and culture as strengths and assets for teaching and learning.
3. Effective school leaders ensure equitable access to key academic resources by providing supports for families that teach about school processes, create a network of individuals in and around the school that can provide supports, and foster connections between families and community organizations to improve social supports and partnerships.

4. Effective school leaders create fair policies to address student misconduct by using evidence-based practices and addressing behavior in a fair and unbiased manner.
5. Effective school leaders confront bias by creating safe spaces for school staff to reflect on their conscious or unconscious biases. School leaders also confront their own biases publicly and model transparency with their staff.
6. Effective school leaders prepare students for a diverse, global society and help students develop 21st century skills.
7. Effective school leaders act with cultural competence and responsiveness by outlining a mission or vision statement that sets the stage for culturally responsive practice.
8. Effective school leaders address equity and cultural responsiveness by establishing new procedures, allocation of resources, and providing professional development opportunities and culturally competent supervision.

Culturally responsive leadership is powerful, yet challenging. A commitment to the improvement of practices through building relationships will support the overall success of all students.

The social and cultural context of the schools of today require more attention to educational philosophies and perspectives of school principals. The cultural and racial identities of students and those who serve them represent a demographic divide, such that students experience levels of cultural mismatch, which happens when students experience discordancy between school and home cultures (Milner, 2007). In some circumstances,

this mismatch results in cultural conflict (Delpit, 1995), and in some cases, schools have attempted to erase or subtract students' cultures through what Valenzuela (1999) describes as subtractive schooling.

In order to develop teachers to provide culturally responsive instruction, principals should practice culturally responsive leadership. With the increase of diverse student demographics in schools, educational leaders must develop their capacity to foster learning environments that value cultural and ethnic diversity and how these environments inform student achievement. Building capacity in the area of culturally responsive leadership will also aid the leader in assisting teachers in establishing a school culture that will enhance student learning and engagement through cultural affirmation and social support. Gay (2000) stated that "opportunities must be provided for students from different ethnic backgrounds to have free personal and cultural expression so that their voices and experiences can be incorporated into teaching and learning process on a regular basis" (p. 43). Culturally responsive leaders understand how important a pedagogical approach is to leading teachers and students who represent diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds and experiences. Culturally responsive leaders ensure that teaching and learning is occurring for all students.

School leaders have a professional duty to lead for equity, engagement, and excellence. According to the NPBEA's (2008) Interstate School Principals Licensure Consortium Standards, the last three standards address issues of "diverse community needs"; "promoting understanding, appreciation, and use of the community's diverse cultural, social and intellectual resources"; and the expectation that school principals will

"safeguard the values of democracy, equity, and diversity," "promote social justice and ensure that individual student needs inform all aspects of schooling," and "promote the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context" (p. 15). These standards underscore the importance of school principals' cultural responsiveness.

School leaders have the responsibility of setting the tone for the school, establishing or sustaining a school's culture, and helping stakeholders set goals and expectations that will increase student achievement (Ramalho, Garza, & Merchant, 2010). Schools face challenges when the stakeholders do not possess cultural knowledge, lack adaptability to diversity, and do not incorporate the experience and perspectives of diverse cultures into the culture of the school organization (Lindsey et al., 2009). These schools require culturally responsive principals who can monitor and mediate cultural conflict by modeling and implementing cross-cultural communication, navigating and negotiating cultural perspectives and conflict through dialogue and mediation, and fostering positive cross-cultural relationships (Horsford et al., 2011). Culturally responsive principals also promote culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy throughout the school and high expectations for all students. Due to the cultural diversity of students and families that are represented in today's schools, school principals must possess the knowledge and skills to effectively educate and advocate for diverse communities.

The culturally responsive teaching framework addresses the many characteristics that the 21st century leader will need to possess to be effective and develop the type of

environment that promotes the success of all students (Taliaferro, 2011). Taliaferro (2011) cites Sergiovanni (1992), referencing that culturally responsive principals lead with an understanding of how their values and belief influence their decision making in schools. Culturally responsive leaders recognize the relationship between "what they say they believe" and "what they actually do" (Sergiovanni, 2007). Sergiovanni (2007) "terms this as the synergy between your heart, hand and head of principalship. These principals are adept to understanding the underlying principles that influence their behavior. They lead with an understanding of self" (p. 3).

A culturally responsive leadership approach requires teachers to be responsive to aspects of the schooling process (Taliaferro, 2011). "Culturally responsive leaders must understand how the physical, intellectual, social, and emotional shape the worldview and experiences of their staff and the school community at-large" (Taliaferro, 2011, p. 4). According to Gay (as cited in Taliaferro, 2011), culturally responsive leaders:

- Encourage their teachers to incorporate culturally valued knowledge into their lesson in order to strengthen the home-school connection.
- Empower teachers to take risks within the educational framework. Teachers are allowed to have or take ownership of their work that aligns with the school's goals and mission.
- Enable students to become better learners and human beings by motivating students to succeed and persevere. Teachers show support for students in their quest to succeed academically.

- Enable feelings of empowerment among teachers, which is essential to their commitment to a positive school cultures and setting appropriate academic expectations for students.

According to Taliaferro (2011),

> Students are more successful in environments that are caring, supportive, and accepting of their identities. Moreover, the home-school relationship will be stronger, if the identifies, educational and schooling histories of the students, staff, and school community are supported and validated. (p. 5)

Finally, as I discussed in Chapter I, the culturally responsive leadership framework described by Khalifa et al. (2016) is significant to my study. It served as my conceptual framework to inform my methods such as the interview protocol and provide a lens to help me analyze my findings.

Summary

In this chapter, I examined three major research topics related to my research interest: school culture, teacher-student relationships, and culturally responsive educational practices. Major themes have emerged in the existing research I reviewed. We know that culturally responsive teaching and leadership practices, as well as characteristics of care, relatedness, warmth, and support between the teacher and student, are essential at developing a positive environment for students and all stakeholders as well. Middle school students who reported positive relationships with teachers are more motivated and engaged, experience inclusivity in the classroom and school culture, and receive higher grades. Other overarching themes in the existing research include:

- School leadership has a direct impact on establishing and sustaining a positive school culture that promotes learning for all stakeholders (teachers, students, parents, and community members).
- Building trusting relationships and creating a sense of belonging is important for school leaders to establish to maintain a positive school culture.
- The characteristics of care, relatedness, warmth, and support were revealed in several studies as essential qualities of positive teacher-student relationships.
- Middle school students feel less connected and supported by their teachers than in elementary school due to structure and increased teacher-student ratio.
- Culturally responsive teaching and leadership practices are essential frameworks to study and consider when establishing and sustaining a positive environment for middle school students.

Some questions remain unanswered: What are the things about fostering positive teacher-student relationships that we do not yet know? What strategies do school leaders use to foster positive teacher-student relationships? How do leaders help teachers show care, relatedness, warmth, and support for their students?

To address questions such as these and enhance extant research knowledge, I studied how school leaders have attempted to establish effective teacher-student relationships in their schools. I wanted to know from the perspectives of various middle school leaders: Why do teachers and student have positive relationships? What helped to foster those relationships? Was it anything that the school leadership intentionally do to foster those relationships? What were the school leaders' goals and reasons for fostering

positive teacher-student relationships? Did promoting culturally responsive teaching and applying culturally responsive practices assist in fostering positive teacher-student relationships? The answers I found to these questions through my research study represent my contribution to the existing research. In Chapter III that follows, I describe the methods I used in my study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research Characteristics

I conducted a basic qualitative research study that involved nine school leaders (three principals, three assistant principals, and three curriculum facilitators) of middle schools. Additionally, I conducted a follow-up interview with just the principals, for a total of 12 interviews. I inquired about the strategies they used to foster teacher-student relationships. Qualitative research is performed when a researcher "gathers, organizes, and interprets information obtained from humans using his or her eyes and ears as filters. It often involves in-depth interviews and/or observations of humans in natural, online, or social settings" (Lichtman, 2009, p. 5). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state,

> Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, artifacts, and cultural texts and productions, along with observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. (p. 4)

Qualitative researchers seek answers to questions that explain how social experience is created and given meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The goal of qualitative research is to determine how meaning is constructed and how people make sense of their lives. The rationale for choosing the basic interpretative qualitative research design was that I

desired to focus on a particular characteristic, trait, or behavior of a person in a particular situation as an outside person looking in.

Basic Qualitative Research

I conducted a basic qualitative research study where I served as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. Basic qualitative research is when a researcher is interested in understanding how the research participants make meaning of a situation; the meaning is mediated through the researcher, the strategy is inductive, and the outcome of the research is descriptive (Merriam, 2002). Merriam (2002) states that "In conducting a basic qualitative study, you seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, the perspectives and worldviews of people involved, or a combination of these" (p. 6). I collected data through strategies such as document analysis, and interviews. I then coded the data to identify recurring themes and patterns that formed across the data.

I desired to interview school leaders (three principals, three assistant principals, and three curriculum facilitators) on their perspectives of what they do as they attempt to foster positive teacher-student relationships. I conducted a follow-up interview with the principals with specific questions related to culturally responsive practices. Creswell (2016) reveals that "qualitative research also enables us to present a complex portrait of a project and present the many different perspectives individuals might have on a topic" (p. 105).

Setting

The research settings were public middle schools that served grades 6-8. I was particularly interested in this setting because I am a current assistant principal of a public middle school where culturally responsive practices have been researched and implemented as the school model. From the examination and triangulation of several data points, my school's model has been effective, thus sparking my curiosity furthermore on culturally responsive practices and school culture, particularly at middle schools. My ultimate goal was to conduct a study in which the findings would provide school leaders a toolkit of strategies they can use that will help all stakeholders build capacity in the area of fostering student/teacher relationships with middle school students.

I interviewed nine school leaders (principal, assistant principal, and curriculum facilitator) at three different middle schools. Below, I provide school profiles for each school; however, when reporting my findings in Chapter IV, I do not indicate the participants' specific school in order to protect their anonymity. All of the schools are located in a medium-sized school district in North Carolina. The data sources I used in composing the profile are as follows:

- 2018 North Carolina Teaching Working Conditions Survey-Q 10.6 "Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn"
- 2018-2019 North Carolina School Report Card
- 2018-2019 Average Daily Membership and Membership Last Day by School (ADM and MLD)-Month 8

Table 1

School Profiles

School Profile	TWC Survey Results	Free/Reduced Lunch Status	Letter Grade	2017-2018 Growth Status	Number of Students Enrolled
School A	61.5%	Title I	F	Did Not Meet Expected Growth	737
School B	95.2%	Non-Title I	B	Met Expected Growth	854
School C	54.0%	Title I	D	Met Expected Growth	606

Following are the school profiles.

School A

School A is a Title I middle school with a school letter grade of F based on the North Carolina School Report Card. Based on the ADM and MLD, student enrollment is at 731 students. School A did not meet expected growth in 2017-2018. Just over 61% of the teachers (61.5%) feel that the school is a good place to work and learn.

School B

Based on the 2018-2019 North Carolina School Report Card, School B is not designated as a Title I middle school. Slightly over 95% of the teachers (95.2%) feel that the school is a good place to work and learn. School enrollment is at 861 students. School B has a school letter grade of B and met expected growth in 2017-2018.

School C

Fifty-four percent of the teachers at school C feel that the school is a good place to work and learn. School C met expected growth in 2017-2018 and has a school letter grade of D. There are 604 students enrolled at this Title I middle school.

Participant Permissions

Qualitative researchers take obtaining participants' permission seriously because qualitative research often focuses on participants' personal feelings regarding issues that are neither easily measured nor assessed. Qualitative research also takes place in the homes and workplaces of participants. Permission for qualitative research is needed from the following sources:

- Institutional review board (IRB) at an institution or company;
- "Gatekeepers" at sites like schools and school districts where access is required to gather information (Creswell, 2016)

The district IRB committee expressed concerns about the anonymity of the participants if I identified the members of the school leadership at each school. Therefore, even though there were three leadership teams and three schools in my study, I report the findings as responses from individual school leaders in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Participants

The participants in my study were school leaders (three principals, three assistant principals, and three curriculum facilitators). There was a total of nine participants. Creswell (2016) states that "the sample size is determined by several factors: the

complexity of the phenomenon being studied, the type of qualitative design you are using, the richness and extensive use of data, and the resources being used" (p. 110). I gleaned an understanding from the middle school leaders regarding how they helped teachers foster positive relationships with their students.

Participant Selection

I selected my participants through a combination of purposeful and convenience sampling, in which I recruited individuals who helped to inform the research question of this study (Creswell, 2016). Purposeful sampling involves making decisions about whom to select to participate in the study, the sampling strategy to use, and the number of individuals for the sample (Creswell, 2016). I purposefully sampled leaders (principals, assistant principals, and curriculum facilitators) who served in public middle schools that served low-income students and students of color.

I used convenience sampling and open recruitment to select my study participants. Convenience sampling is when the researcher selects individuals or groups who are available and willing to participate in the research study (Omona, 2013). An example of convenience sampling is using subjects from an institution who are easily accessible to the researcher. A convenience sample is either an accessible collection of subjects or volunteers willing to participate. Convenience sampling gave me more access to a broader pool of middle school leaders who serve low-income students of color and were willing to talk to me about how they attempted to foster positive teacher-student relationships. The data collected helped me to determine the effectiveness of the school leaders' practices based on the culturally responsive leadership framework.

Open recruitment is a way to identify and enlist people to participate in a research study. The open recruitment plan included the following criteria:

- Criteria for screening potential participants
  - Middle school leaders who serve low-income students of color
- The number of people to be recruited
  - Nine school leaders—three principals, three assistant principals, and three curriculum facilitators
- The location
  - To be determined by researcher and study participant
- The approach to be used
  - Semi-structured interviews

The recruitment criteria can be changed if data collection activities or subpopulations of people prove not to be useful in answering the research questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Fortunately, all of my study participants were extremely knowledgeable and provided substantial answers to my research questions. I recruited individuals by sending an invitation e-mail. An example of the recruitment e-mail is located in Appendix D. In order for the reader to obtain a detailed understanding of the characteristics of the participants, the participants' demographics are displayed in Table 2, which includes the participants' position, years of experience in current position, race, and gender. The participant names are pseudonyms. Written participant profiles are presented immediately following Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Profiles

School Leader	Position	Years of Experience in Current Position	Race	Gender
Chandler	Principal	12	Black	Female
Douglas	Principal	9	White	Male
Kynnedy	Principal	7	White	Female
Bennett	Assistant Principal	1	Black	Female
Sage	Assistant Principal	5	Black	Female
Dreux	Assistant Principal	4	Black	Female
Knox	Curriculum Facilitator	1	Black	Female
Chyna	Curriculum Facilitator	1	Black	Female
Stanley	Curriculum Facilitator	8	White	Female

Principal Chandler

Principal Chandler has been a principal for the last 12 years. She has a bachelor's degree in education and psychology. She also has a master's degree in school administration. Prior to becoming a principal, she served as an assistant principal for 4 years. She has been the principal at her current school for the past 7 years. Principal Chandler's Relationship Affirmation Statement: "*Treat people the way you want to be treated*."

Principal Douglas

Principal Douglas's educational background includes earning a bachelor's of science, as well as a master's and doctorate in educational leadership. Prior to becoming a principal, Dr. Douglas was an assistant principal for 5 years at a high school. Dr.

Douglas has been a principal for 9 years and has been at his current school for past 5 years.

Principal Douglas's Relationship Affirmation Statement: "*You've got to check yourself at the door, because our kids need you 100%, 100% of the time*."

Principal Kynnedy

For the past 7 years, Principal Kynnedy has been a principal. She has been at the current school for the past 2 years. Prior to becoming a principal, she was an assistant principal and a curriculum facilitator. She has bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in music. She has a master's in Teaching, Mathematics, and School Administration.

Principal Kynnedy's Relationship Affirmation Statement: "*It is the teachers' responsibility to ensure excellence.*"

Assistant Principal Bennett

Assistant Principal Bennett just completed her first year as an assistant principal. She served as curriculum facilitator at her current school the year prior. She has a bachelor's degree is elementary education and a master's degree in administration.

Assistant Principal Bennett's Relationship Affirmation Statement: "*Be vulnerable and go for it.*"

Assistant Principal Dreux

Assistant Principal Dreux has a bachelor's and master's degree in elementary education. She has also earned her administration certificate and specialist in education degrees and is currently an educational leadership doctoral candidate. Prior to becoming

an assistant principal, she served as a curriculum facilitator. She has been an assistant principal for the last 4 years.

Assistant Principal Dreux's Relationship Affirmation Statement: "*Every child deserves a champion. An adult never gives up on them, understands the power of connection and insists that they become the best that they can possibly be –Pearson.*"

Assistant Principal Sage

Prior to assuming the assistant principal role that she has held for the past 5 years, Mrs. Sage served as a curriculum facilitator for one year. She has a bachelor's in business administration, a master's in teaching and learning and administration, and a specialist in educational leadership degree.

Assistant Principal Sage's Relationship Affirmation Statement: "*Kids don't care about what you know until they know that you care.*"

Curriculum Facilitator Chyna

Prior to becoming a curriculum facilitator, Mrs. Chyna served as a course facilitator. She has been the curriculum facilitator at her current school for one year. She was a journalism major is just completed her master's in instructional design and technology.

Curriculum Facilitator Chyna's Relationship Affirmation Statement: "*I would rather be understanding than upset*."

Curriculum Facilitator Knox

Curriculum Facilitator Knox has been a curriculum facilitator for one year at her current school. Prior to becoming a curriculum facilitator, Ms. Knox served as a literacy

coach. She has a bachelor's degree in middle grades education and is currently pursuing her master's degree in curriculum and instruction.

Curriculum Facilitator Knox's Relationship Affirmation Statement: "*There is no success without relationships.*"

Curriculum Facilitator Stanley

Curriculum Facilitator has been a curriculum facilitator at her current school for the past 3 years. She has previously served as a district-level program specialist. She has bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in educational leadership.

Curriculum Facilitator Stanley's Relationship Affirmation Statement: "*Between getting kids to do what you want them to do, and how hard we as teachers work, but it's not a reflection of how hard you are working, but rather a misalignment in the work you do and the impact to the students you teach.*"

Data Collection

I collected data through interviews with the school leaders. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) state that the "research interview is an interpersonal situation, a conversation between two parties about a theme of mutual interest" (p. 123). I scheduled one-on-one interviews with the principals, assistant principals, and curriculum facilitators. I used a semi-structured interview method which contained a mix of more and less structured questions.

> Usually, specific information is desired from all participants; this forms the highly structured section of the interview. The largest part of the interview is guided by

> a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. (Merriam, 2002, p. 13)

I conducted in-person, face-to-face interviews with the participants. The advantages of face-to-face, in-person interviews were that they are cost- and time-effective, allowed open exchanges, and they allowed me to control the line of questioning by being able to probe and "dig deeper" when needed. Developing a personal rapport with interview participants was another important reason I conducted face-to-face, in-person interviews. There was always a conversation after the interview due to the emergence of relatable colleagues and topics. Knowing that online or phone interviews are even more cost- and time-effective, those options were available if the face-to-face interview absolutely could not be conducted. I was thankful that I was able to conduct all 12 interviews face-to-face in a 2-week time period. I was extremely thankful to my interview participants and proud of my diligence and tenacity exuded in order to complete the tasks and stay on my personal timeline. I used the interview protocol that I developed when I conducted the interviews. Creswell (2016) defines a protocol as "the means for recording the qualitative data and for asking questions" (p. 114). Some of the limitations of interviewing are that my presence may have biased responses and not all participants may have been articulate and perceptive (Creswell, 2016). My participants were open, passionate, and candid.

Culturally Responsive Lens

I used a culturally responsive lens in creating my interview protocols and understanding the data from the interviews. According to Ladson-Billings (1994),

culturally responsive teaching is not a series of steps that teachers can follow, or a recipe for being effective with African American students. Instead, culturally responsive teaching is a way of thinking in which teachers value the experiences and cultures of their students. In her book *The Dreamkeepers,* Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) identifies six tenets of culturally responsive teaching and the characteristics of culturally responsive teachers. I used the tenets to help develop questions for the interview guide.

1. They have high self-esteem and high regard for others.
2. They see themselves as part of the community; they see teaching as giving back to the community, and they encourage their students to do the same.
3. They see teaching as an art, and themselves as artists.
4. They help students make connections among their community, national, and global identities.
5. They believe that all students can succeed.
6. They see teaching as "digging knowledge out" of students. (pp. 59–84)

I focused on these culturally responsive tenets in order to encourage school leaders to share the culturally responsive strategies they have in their personal toolkits that can be used by teachers for all students. The interview protocols are listed in Appendix A and B.

Interview Process

I began each interview with an introduction period during which I defined the purpose for conducting the research study, stated the purpose of the interview, conducted an equipment/recorder check, and asked the participants if they had any questions prior to

beginning the interview. I also followed up with a debriefing at the conclusion of the interview for reflection. The majority of the interviews lasted one hour and 30 minutes, for a total of 13.5 hours. The follow-up interviews with the principals lasted one hour as well. With 12 interviews, I accumulated 16.5 hours of research data. The document review satisfied the 20-hour research expectation.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurs simultaneous with data collection, with the researcher beginning to analyze data with the first interview, observation, or document analysis. Simultaneous data collection and analysis allows the researcher to make adjustments along the way, redirect data, and test emerging concepts, themes, and categories against subsequent data. When one waits to analyze data, one loses the opportunity to collect more reliable data due to themes that may emerge from prior interviews (Merriam, 2002).

According to Hatch (2002),

> Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning. It is a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others. Analysis means organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories. It often involves synthesis, evaluation, interpretation, categorization, hypothesizing, comparison, and pattern finding. (p. 148)

I conducted interpretive data analysis. Interpretation involves giving meaning to data and making sense of social situations by developing explanations of what is occurring in the situation. The qualitative researcher develops insights, makes inferences,

attaches significance, and develops conclusions. Qualitative researchers construct interpretations.

Hatch (2002) believes that the interpretive analysis model provides a framework for inexperienced researchers to apply the process and has the flexibility to modify or adjust data analysis methods to suit the needs of the study. The steps of the interpretive data analysis model I used included the following:

1. Read the data for a sense of the whole.
2. Reviewed impressions previously recorded in research journals and/or bracketed in protocols and record these in memos.
3. Read the data, identify impressions, and recorded impressions in memos. Memos are written notes to oneself about one's thoughts, impressions, and understanding of the data.
4. Studied memos for salient interpretations. Identified the memos that are important to the final report of findings. The goal was to organize memos into their relation to one another and how they connect with the topic.
5. Reread data, coding places where interpretations are supported or challenged. I created a coding system that allowed me to identify where the data related to the salient memos were identified.
6. Wrote a draft summary. I began the process of crafting my interpretations into a story that others can understand.

7. Reviewed interpretations with participants. At this point, I implemented member checking where I presented participants with transcripts, memos, and summaries.
8. Wrote a revised summary and identify excerpts that support interpretation. Taking the feedback from member checking into account, I drafted a revised summary. I also searched the data for excerpts and quotes I used in my final draft.

Hatch (2002) states,

> Interpretive analysis fits most comfortably within the assumption of the constructivist paradigm. Interpretations are usually framed as one set of explanations for what is happening in the setting. It is understood that the researcher *constructs* those explanations and that other interpretations are possible. Often, participants are active co-constructors of the understanding that emanate from interpretive analysis, and it is possible to engage participant involvement all along the analysis process. (p. 189)

Qualitative research can also present challenges for data analysis. Vaughn and Turner (2016) note,

> Some of the challenges include issues with managing, organizing, and analyzing the data:
> - Organizing large amounts of qualitative data systematically
> - Selecting a tool to manage the data
> - Storing data accessibly after analysis
> - Maintaining consistency in coding
> - Using interpretation appropriately (p. 43)

I identified connections and themes in the interview data through coding. Coding is a considered a systematic way to organize and highlight meaning from descriptive data

collected during the qualitative research process. I selected the qualitative coding software Dedoose to assist me with data analysis. Dedoose was extremely user friendly and was an enormous asset during the coding process. My codes emerged from my prior knowledge as an educational practitioner and information I gained from the literature review. The coding process allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the thoughts of the school leaders. The school leaders were extremely knowledgeable, professional, and well-versed in the area of building relationships. Their answers were ironically similar to what I would have answered if I were serving as an interview participant in this study. It was refreshing that the school leaders share the same passion for teacher-student relationships as do I. It was an honor that they agreed to participate in my study and I am thankful for their contribution to this scholarly work.

The coding and theme development process was intriguing for me and one of the milestones of my study execution. I would use the following adjectives to describe it: eye-opening, beautiful, scholarly, dope, lit, personal, passionate, witty, thought-provoking, enlightening, relieving, and breathtaking. Codes collapsed, themes emerged, and roles and strategies developed—it all came together in harmony and developed as a personal testimony through scholarly research. The codes and themes that emerged from the coding process are listed on charts in Appendix C.

Organizing large amounts of data through coding and, if necessary, categorization was helpful in the identification of the main themes in the data. These themes constituted as my study's main findings.

Subjectivity and Positionality: My Story and My Reason

I am an African American female who has just completed my seventh year as a middle school assistant principal. My journey as a school leader has been amazing and I appreciate all of the experiences that I have been afforded. I began my career as a sixth-grade language arts and social studies teacher at Michelle Obama Middle School (a pseudonym). I was only 21 when I accepted my first teaching position. I worked at a Title I school that served students from two rival housing authorities. I dealt with a lot of discipline issues as a teacher; however, I feel that I was able to be successful through relationships. I was the cool, but firm, young and creative teacher. I helped my students earn high test scores and I held several leadership positions in the school. I was the cheerleading coach and I spent much time in the community with my students. I served as school "auntie" and "mom" to many students. I established a relationship with one of my students, and her mom introduced me one day as her "god-mom." I was extremely honored and took that role to heart. I followed my god-daughter who is now 26 throughout high school and never missed any activity in which she was involved. She recently had a son and she honored me by choosing me to be his godmother. That gesture alone showed me the power of teacher-student relationships.

Although my students did not come from favorable backgrounds, I learned a lot about diversity and empathy. My students were successful because I took the time to get to know them individually and created lessons geared toward their interests. I also took the time to get to know them beyond the classroom as a mentor and cheerleading coach. I attended events to which they invited me in the community. I formed relationships with

their families. I have been an administrator at several middle school and have encountered educators who had terrible relationships issues with their students. The teacher is usually the person with the issue, or bias, because honestly, I believe kids will be kids. They deserve a teacher who will think about how to build relationships and what will stand in the way of those relationships; show genuine, authentic, and appropriate care for their students; and intentionally build relationships with their students through engaging lessons and provide students with the academic support they need to succeed.

I consider myself to be a relational leader because I believe I make an intentional effort to build relationships with all stakeholders. My personal viewpoint is that I feel students need the help of caring and supportive teachers in order to become successful. I believe that leaders should make intentional efforts to help teachers and students develop positive teacher-student relationships. Additionally, I am confident in my belief that it takes support from all stakeholders in order for a student to flourish in the learning environment and achieve academically.

I accounted for my own implicit bias as an African-American female assistant principal conducting the study when discussing that particular interview question with my participants. I was constantly thinking of how I responded to different situations and my interactions (memories, stories, experiences) with teachers and students. I also realized that the perspectives and tactics that I would implement as a leader were different from others but did not influence my objectivity in collecting, understanding, and analyzing the data.

To protect myself from this influence, I used the process of reflexivity throughout the research process. A qualitative researcher is a central figure who is actively involved in all stages of research. Qualitative research is a shared product of the researcher-participant relationship, and one way to manage the different insights that develop throughout the study is to use reflexivity. Band-Winterstein, Doran, and Naim (2014) define reflexivity as

> an ongoing mental process accompanied by intentional thinking and critical analysis of knowledge and experience, aimed at achieving deeper understanding of the meaning people attribute to their assumptions about the world, and about human behaviors and experiences. (p. 531)

When in a reflective stance, one is situated inside and outside of the phenomenon.

In relation to qualitative research, reflexivity enhances the trustworthiness of the research because the process highlights existing barriers, power balances, and ethical questions, as well as develops new perspectives and questions to promote research. The literature review revealed that previous research has focused on the need for researchers to reflect on demographic differences—gender, race, or ethnicity, age, cohort—between themselves and the research participants; however, it is also important to focus on the differences between researchers' and participants' perceptions of the way of life, which is the main purpose of the research (Underwood, Satterthwait, & Bartlett, 2010). As the researcher, it was also important for me to be aware of my positions, attitudes, perspectives, and presences during the study.

Throughout the study, I constantly asked myself the following questions:

1. What do I bring to the research?
2. Who am I?
3. What is my personal and professional background?
4. What does the research topic provoke in me in relation to memories, feelings, thoughts, attitudes, prejudices, and imaginations as a person and a researcher?

I maintained a "reflexivity notebook" to journal my responses to these questions as the study progressed. I absolutely recommend journaling as a thought organization strategy. I used my journal to pull the thoughts from my mind, outline, and organize all of my sections and data. My journal was an important part of my dissertation process. Through the process of bracketing (a method used in qualitative research to ease the potential unwanted effects of unacknowledged preconceptions related to the research), I "bracket-out" beliefs in order to enter the lived experience and attend actively to the participants' views (Underwood et al., 2010). I approached the study by suspending my expectations, preconceptions, experiences, and knowledge about the phenomenon to the greatest degree possible (Underwood et al., 2010).

Trustworthiness

In order to develop trustworthiness during the study, I used several strategies. Reflexivity and member checking are two strategies that I have mentioned that aided in establishing trustworthiness throughout this study. I revealed my positionality and used a conversational (vs. formal) dialogue format during the interview process. I worked with the research participants and developed a mutual time for the interviews and respected

the agreed-upon time constraints. I asked probing follow-up questions that ensured the length and depth of responses were sufficient to produce the data needed to validate the research.

I also evaluated the trustworthiness of the data through the process of member checking. Creswell (2016) states that "member checking is when the researcher takes back to the participants their themes or entire stories and asks the participants whether the themes or stories are an accurate representation of what they said" (p. 192). I provided participants with transcripts of their interviews as well as a detailed description of themes that emerged during the data analysis. I asked the participants to review the transcribed interviews in an effort to provide clarification, additions, or deletions to the information shared during their interview sessions. I also solicited their feedback to ensure that their interviews were accurately transcribed and interpreted. There were no revisions suggested by the participants.

Benefits and Risks

The benefit of this study is that aspiring school leaders will able to learn from the perspectives of school leaders the various strategies to foster positive teacher-student relationships. The study identified participants' attitudes, biases, and beliefs about how those relationships should be fostered and developed. Many of the participants stated that the study served as self-reflection tool.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that it was conducted on several public middle schools in one school system. The study was not conducted at the elementary and high

school levels, which potentially narrows the transferability of findings. The strategies revealed may not apply to other educational settings, as I was focused on school leaders who are skilled at applying strategies to foster positive teacher-student relationship at the middle school level.

I also only sought the perspectives of school leaders on how they foster positive teacher-student relationships at the middle school level. Findings from my research indicate that all stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, school leaders, and community members) have a role in fostering positive teacher-student relationships. Establishing a positive school culture that enables positive teacher-student relationships to occur requires the effort of all stakeholders. This study only focused on the role of the school leaders in that effort.

Summary

This qualitative study was designed to examine the stakeholders' perceptions of the strategies school leaders apply to foster positive teacher-student relationships with middle school students. The basic qualitative approach allowed me to examine school leaders and their perspectives of the stakeholders whom they serve. Through the interviews with the school leaders, I was able to gain an overall sense of the culture of the school and individual strategies school leaders used to help foster positive teacher-student relationships. It is my hope that through this study, readers will glean best practices and learn leadership lessons as they attempt to foster positive relationship between teachers and students.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Chapter IV consists of the findings from my research study. My findings emerged from my examination of 12 interview transcripts and my reflection journal. The primary research question for study is, "*What do school leaders do to foster positive teacher-student relationships with middle school students?*"

As the principal investigator during the data collection process, I developed an interest into how each of the leaders' roles had an impact on how they help teachers build relationships with middle school students. In seeking an answer to my research question, I initially conducted individual interviews with the principal, assistant principal, and curriculum facilitator at three schools, ultimately interviewing nine participants. I then held a follow-up interview with just the principals of each school. I conducted a total of 12 interviews.

I present this chapter in two parts as I discuss the central themes that emerged from the interviews. In Part I, I discuss how school leaders in specific roles (principals, assistant principals, and curriculum facilitators) help to foster positive teacher-student relationships. In Part II of this chapter, I present strategies that the school leaders suggested for effectively establishing and maintaining teacher-student relationships.

Part I:
Roles of School Leaders (Principal, Assistant Principal, and Curriculum Facilitator) in Fostering Effective Teacher-Student Relationships in Middle Schools

Theme 1: School Leaders Model How to Build Relationships

School leaders believe that their role (although executed differently) in helping to foster positive teacher-student relationships with middle school students is to model how to build relationships. Principal Chandler shares that modeling is very important if one wants a behavior replicated.

> I think the first thing is model. You have to model. If teachers see the principal laughing, talking, listening, hugging, being firm when needed, holding students accountable, attending students' activities outside of school, telling them—giving them positive feedback when they do something great. Telling them what they need to do better when they don't do something great. I think modeling is important. So whatever you want replicated, you have to model it.

Principal Chandler also adds,

> I think of it just like students, when students do great, you say, awesome job, K., I like it when you did x, y, z, and when students don't do it, so I treat my staff like a classroom, like, you know, they are students, they're on my roster. And so "Ms. J., hey, I noticed today that you and J. went back and forth with each other. I understand that he, you know, makes you frustrated, gets you angry, because sometimes he makes me feel that way." And so I typically disengage with J. when he's like that. So could you try that next time? So just giving them suggestions, not in a demeaning way, because we're all human, but I want—that's a two-part in that conversation. One, I want Ms. J. to know that I saw her or heard her do something that I didn't like. But I didn't say, "Ms. J., I didn't like it when you argued with J." But that was my way of saying I saw it, I didn't necessarily like that, but here's something you could try, so giving them something to try, or something to put in their toolbox, or something to reflect on, something to think about without saying, "You're wrong, you didn't do this right," or whatever.

Principal Chandler wanted to make the teacher aware that she noticed the strained relationship as well as offer an effective strategy to work through the incident with the student.

Curriculum Facilitator Stanley models how to build relationships with her interactions with adults as well:

> Well I think a lot of that is also modeled. So how I interact as an adult with other adults and adults to children models for them how they should interact. If I'm grumpy when you come in the room as a student, then I'm modeling grumpiness as opposed to interaction, yet if teachers are standing in the hallway also in between classes and they're chatting not only to students but with teachers and you can tell that there's a camaraderie there, then that shows me oh, those adults have a camaraderie relationship then I need to have that kind of a bond.

Curriculum Facilitator Stanley believes that teacher and student relationships can strengthen when they observe school leaders' positive interactions with others.

Assistant Principal Dreux models how to build relationships by being an advocate for student equity and social justice. She ensures that students have access to learning opportunities:

> And so when I'm already there, it's like he'll ignore him and he'll teach the class. And so because he ignores the student, and I don't know if this because I'm in there or what, but I'm like, "Hey, Mr. L., can I get that paper? Hey, Mr. L., you forgot us, hey, Mr.," you know, so it's like, nyaa, and I'm gonna teach everybody else. And—which doesn't give that ch—that's not equitable and it doesn't give that student access to the assignments, and so they have to realize that because they have this strained relationship with the student, that student is not learning.

Additionally, Assistant Principal Dreux models how to build relationships by examining her own implicit bias and practicing administrator self-reflection. In essence, she wants to practice what she preaches.

> But to be—but I have to check my own biases. Because see, I naturally pay attention to certain kids, and I have to check my own self, like it's naturally, and I think it's just the—I don't know, I think it's just the human part of in us and our relatability. I'm a naturally go to black kids saying, I just, I'm a naturally go to Black—Black kids naturally come to my office, I just—I just do. I'm not going—and so now I have to check myself and make sure I talk to the White kids.

Practicing self-reflection and recognizing her own biases assist Assistant Principal Dreux in her efforts to help teachers become self-reflective in their interactions and relationships with their own students.

Assistant Principal Sage believes that school leaders should be models for teachers because teachers view administrators as positive role models for themselves.

> So I have—we have this saying, "The oil flows from the top down." And I believe that as a principal and as an assistant principal, where we're similar, we too have to have positive relationships with kids, we can't tell a teacher, "Hey, you need to build this relationship with this kid," and we ourselves don't, you know, and so, just being—being an example to teachers of how to build relationships with kids is something that we as principals have to do, again, because we're the leaders of the building, and the kids are looking up to us, the teachers are looking up to us.

Assistant Principal Sage specifically mentioned coaching and modeling as an effective way to help teachers establish relationships and classroom management.

> So that's where their coaching and modeling comes in. So typically a curriculum facilitator should be people that have already been a teacher, and have been successful in that role and they've been successful in establishing relationships

> with their students, and so when we see a teacher who is struggling, maybe with classroom management, it all boils down to the relationship with kids, they don't have it. So the curriculum facilitator's role is to provide some coaching and modeling strategies for the teachers to help build that relationship, if they're struggling with it.

Assistant Principal Sage believes that the curriculum facilitator's role is to provide modeling and coaching strategies to teachers who are struggling to build relationships with their students because the curriculum facilitator should have been successful in their previous role as a teacher.

Curriculum Facilitator Chyna believes that administrators model how to build relationships by providing teams with role transparency.

> And I think it's important for the teachers to also realize the difference too, because when you're in your own world, you don't know what everyone else is doing so you get the perception that either they're not on the same page, or they're not doing what they're supposed to do, because they really don't know what you're supposed to be doing. So that transparency piece is important to maintain positive relationships amongst coworkers, too.

Curriculum Facilitator Chyna feels that it is important for all members of the leadership team to be transparent in their roles so that teachers can understand how each role contributes to their support. Transparency builds trust so that relationships can form and sustain.

Principal Kynnedy also agrees that transparency and the understanding of roles are ways to model how to build relationships. As principal, she models how to interview students for her assistant principals so that the assistant principals will be able to replicate this behavior with teachers and students when a disciplinary issue occurs.

> Yeah, right, so I think a lot of it is coming down to even talking to how they interview kids and how they interview, so something that we've had to have conversations about is if a teacher brings a student to them, don't start talking to the student before you start talking to the adult. So that's something that we've had to have some conversations about, because teachers will feel that you're listening to them more than you are them. So small things along those lines, and then again, it's telling the teacher what you're doing and why you're doing it, so that they know that you're supporting the kid. I am going to listen to the student but I'm going to listen to you first. Student, do not interrupt me, whatever your name is, don't interrupt me, I'm listening to Ms. so and so. And then I'll talk to you. But those are pieces to make sure that the teachers know they're being listened to and heard. And then when you get into with a kid, now, I know that what she said you didn't agree with most of it, but I really appreciate you for not, so modeling what—how I want teachers to handle discipline, because we can undermine ourselves if we think the tea—if teachers think that I don't believe them when they come in, or that I'm questioning them, or that I'm prioritizing the child over them, and there are times that I believe the child more than I do the teacher. But I'm not going to do that in front of a child. So I'm not going to do anything to undermine that teacher's authority in front of the child, because they still have to be the one to go back into that classroom and lead.

Principal Kynnedy wanted to model effective strategies for her assistant principals as well as her teachers because, ultimately, they are the ones on the front lines with the students. One of her goals is to encourage restorative relationships.

Assistant Principal Bennett models how to build relationships through her everyday interactions with students.

> I think for me, it's showing them first, being that model. I pride myself in knowing almost every single student's name in the whole school. And I'm—I only do sixth grade, so I don't have to. But I pretty much every child's name, and I know something about them. So I try to make sure throughout the year that I do that. Their name, their first and last name, and know something about them. So I think I tried to model that behavior.

Principal Kynnedy echoes this same belief in knowing all of her students' names:

> I'm also known, like if you go on the hallway and talk to teachers or parents, even when we have different teams who've come through or we've done walk through here, I know every one of my kid's names. And so just doing that establishes the fact that relationship is important to me. So if I know things about the kids, then the expectation is that they better know them, too. And so it's not—and that's not empirically stated, but that's something that they pick up on.

Principal Kynnedy models her expectations of how she would like her staff to interact with their students through her own interactions with students.

As a curriculum facilitator, Mrs. Stanley feels that she must be extremely intentional about modeling how to build relationships with students. Since Mrs. Stanley is more in a teacher support role, she does not necessarily interact with students on a consistent basis.

> So for kids, I—this is—bus duty's not a bad thing. Bus duty to be able to every bus student who comes I see every morning, so that—seeing them, and I may not know every student's name, but I'm trying. But I do think that's another piece, to know their name, particularly me not being their teacher. So I think those are some things. I have kids all the time who walk in here and my candy is for teachers. But kids will come in here, "Ms. Stanley, can I have some?" "Yes, don't put it in your pocket, don't tell her you got it from me because I'm going to head on out the door," but particularly those kids, they need it. They need to see me. And if that's what makes them have a smile on their face that day, then absolutely.

Curriculum Facilitator Stanley makes an intentional effort to engage in positive interactions with students. Her goal is for teachers to intuitively recognize the effort and importance of a person in her role to build relationships with students.

Principal Douglas believes that modeling is important because all educators can learn from each other.

> I think the only other thing I would say is just I think the more you can observe and the more that you can get people watching other people is what helps. So whether it's teachers watching the teachers, whether it's CFs watching teachers or administrators or whatever it is, I think, you know, I think we have great people in the job of education and we forget about that, and we send them elsewhere, when we have great people in every single school, so just getting them to observe each other is what works.

Principal Douglas feels that all educators are valuable and can learn from each other. Learning from each other establishes trust, respect, and lasting relationships.

Assistant Principal Sage shared the same sentiments as Dr. Douglas in regard to being able to learn from other educators in the building as a way of modeling how to build relationships:

> So like Dr. C., he is beyond, I can't even really—I really think he's the angel in the sky, honestly, he's one of those type of people, he's—I mean because he is a pastor as well, and I don't know how we ended up with this man, but he's—yeah, we definitely know that. But in terms of supporting me, so I support him as his math supervisor. But when it comes to leadership being in school because he already has—he's a doctor, doctor, he already got—been there, done that, he's been a professor at Bennett College for a number of years. He's been a math department chair. So this man is like, like, you know, I don't know, he's amazing, so when it comes to me building who I am as a leader, he—I go to him. But we know how to go back and forth in our roles with one another, so I can submit to him, but he also can submit to me, and so there's never been a power struggle between the two. I never felt intimidated by him. He's never felt intimidated by me.

Assistant Principal Sage feels that even though she is a school leader, she can learn from other professional educators.

Curriculum Facilitator Knox suggested modeling how to build relationships by explicitly teaching skills on how to interact with other people and manage tough situations.

> I would say assistant principal is the first line of defense before going to the principal. Well, I wouldn't even say first line, I would say guidance should be the first line. Because primarily they're teaching kids how to interact with other people, how to deal with their emotions. I think that's what's lacking, a lot. I've been in a school where the protocol was you call guidance counselor before you even call the AP. And there are certain things that a guidance counselor had to do and if that step was skipped, the AP pushes it back to the guidance counselor, because we're trying to teach the kids the strategies to deal and interact with people because we know in the real world, even college and career, they're going to have to be able to problem solve.

Theme 2: School Leaders Provide Teachers with Focused Feedback

School leaders believe that their role in helping to foster positive teacher-student relationships with middle school students includes providing teachers with focused feedback. Assistant Principal Sage likes to provide initial feedback in order to focus on one target area for improvement:

> So one of the things is, so you know, of course, you provide that initial feedback. And what we try to do is be more focused in our feedback whereas each week we come in there we're doing—looking at something different. No, what we try to do now is we're going in there and looking for something specific. We wait until the teacher has mastered that thing, and then move on to something different.

According to Assistant Principal Sage, focused areas of improvement allow a teacher to master one area before tackling another area.

Mainly through individual conversations, Assistant Principal Dreux likes to provide feedback that focuses on one target area for improvement. Once the target area is identified, she sends staff resources.

> I send them articles. We talk about—I give them resources. My—at our last grade level meeting I had get—showed them a website that they could go on and utilize Tier I interventions, Tier II, because I'm also over IST. A lot of the work is in—through individual conversations. After we do—after I conduct observations, it's more easier to do that one-on-one. The other thing is I'm over the ELA, so during our PLCs, our content meetings, I will share some things in there or, you know, talk—we'll talk a lot—lately, our focus has been on small group instruction, so I will utilize my data, my observation data, to give them feedback and talk about what we can focus on, like what we need to focus on. So giving them data, sending them resources, giving them feedback.

Principal Douglas enjoys participating in class activities in order to be able to provide feedback and suggestions for improvement:

> I'd probably try to push him out of the way several times a year, go in class and teach. So I think that helps, I think when I go in when I'm just doing typical walkthroughs, I'm a student, so I raise my hand, I ask questions. Teachers sometimes don't like me because I get kids off task. Yeah, you know, like I think you jump in and do it with them when I provide feedback, I mean, I've tried to give them just suggestions, right, so it's not bad, it's, "Hey, have you ever thought about doing this? Have you tried this? Hey, go to this website and look at this great way that you can integrate it." So giving them tips, tricks, and tools that right then they could use I think allows them to see me not just as somebody who sits in an office, but someone who's trying to get in it with them.

Principal Douglas participates in lessons from the lens of a student so that he can provide immediate instructional feedback and support to teachers.

Curriculum Facilitator Knox provides focused feedback after performing weekly walkthroughs.

> I do weekly walkthroughs. We do—as an admin team we divide it out, like who our observation teacher, or observing teachers are. I have BTs and a select number of teachers. So I observe them weekly and provide feedback. And then through PLCs, I provide some support with different instructional strategies and resources, and most recently, we started doing virtual PLCs. So what I do is I provide videos or blogs, webinars, different things like that for teachers to view or to manipulate. And sometimes there's a takeaway for them to create something.

Based on feedback from teachers, Curriculum Facilitator Knox provides virtual resources for teachers based on the trends she observes during walkthroughs. The resources are teacher specific. This platform enables teachers to receive professional development in which they can participate at their own pace, apply their learning to lessons, and create an artifact they can use as evidence for evaluations.

Similar to Curriculum Facilitator Knox, Principal Kynnedy also solicits feedback from teachers, especially to gain insight on how to allocate resources.

> I always—in every meeting that we have with a "What do you need?" "What do you need me to know?" So that's a very local and an ending part of it. I also have a lot of surveys that are out there just—it's not Google Docs, but the Microsoft Forms. I send out that on every weekly communication I have of soliciting back what's an idea suggestion, or question that you have.

Principal Chandler practices shared leadership by having members of her instructional learning team share feedback from needs assessments they conduct with their departments.

> So they were key, they were critical components of the needs assessment, going through and having to go to report to the departments, that's a difficult place to be in as a colleague go into a department and say you're good at this, but you're not good at that and we're on the same level. So you know I gave them huge compliments on being brave and courageous for doing that. They of course, attend new leaders professional development, along with me and the other

> administrators in the building. We've taken specific teachers on staff that are struggling based on data, and made action plans together. We've chosen teachers based on data that we need to go in as a team to see and create plans. We made that the culture of the school, we created a purpose, we told them in the beginning, this is a team approach, we want to expand the leadership.

Principal Chandler uses shared leadership to strengthen the culture of her school. She feels that hearing feedback from teacher leaders strengthens the team approach, develops a culture of collaboration, and strengthens collegial relationships.

Principal Chandler also believes in seeking feedback on her performance in order to become a better leader.

> I think not getting set in the way you usually do business is important. Because you can think your way is a great way, and I think asking for feedback and asking questions to the people you serve is important because we sometimes get caught up in what we think is the right way. Especially when you've been doing it a while, you just go about doing it the way you know how to do and you think you're halfway good. But when you ask people, "Can you help me be better," like people will give you—I believe that if you're surrounded by people they'll give you good feedback. You got to be able to take that. So I think that's what would help me get better if it's—if I ask for feedback.

Principal Chandler believes in being a lifelong learner. She asks for feedback from her staff in order for her to self-reflect and continue to grow as a leader.

Principal Kynnedy mentioned focused feedback that she may especially need to provide because it is related to professionalism rather than instruction.

> That's really not her role. So I try to keep—I try to keep the CF very different from an administrative role. So I don't want her to muddy her experience in her professional collegiality saying that there is an issue with professional or with those relationships. So she's really just meeting with them where they are in the PLCs. She goes in and does observations with us when we're looking at questioning or if we're looking at student discourse, or those lines, but she's not

> looking at student discipline. She's not. And I think the thing we have here, we don't have teachers who have classroom management issues across the board, and I think that's something that's very different. I don't have any brand-new teachers, so I don't have—it's a very leveled, it's a very different support than like when I was at Southern or when I taught at Hairston or when I was at Allen. The experience level is very different so I don't have teachers that need those teachers, they don't need the strategies. Like this one teacher that I mentioned, there's—ain't nothing the CF gonna do. If there was, she would do it, but it's not that point, she's not learning how to be a teacher. We're in act now time, we need to change a personality. And we can do that.

Principal Kynnedy believes that some feedback should come from a specific person on the leadership team based on that person's role and relationship.

Principal Chandler remembered a time when she was required to provide a first-year teacher feedback on her professionalism and her interactions with students.

> So I'm thinking about a first-year math teacher now who is strong coming in, I knew she was a good hire, I knew she was going to be good, but I also know that first-year teachers struggle on just regular stuff that's outside of the classroom, like angry parents, multiple meetings, that kind of stuff. So I knew she'd be fine with teaching, but all this other stuff she's kind of struggling with and so like, for instance, she has the teaching part kind of down, but she's loud, she's very, very, very, very loud. And I almost think she's mimicking someone she admires on staff that's near her. And so I've had to say, you're a really, really good teacher and I don't think for you it takes all that right. You're really, that's not that's not you. And I said to her, I remember in your interview, and I pulled out the folder, I said, I wrote this about you. You answered this question like this, and I said this about you, and I said this about you, and some of this is not matching. And so I kind of take them back to what they said in the initial interview, especially my beginning teachers, and why they wanted to be there, what was important to them, and why should I hire them? I take them back to that to say, "Hey, this is what we talked about, this is what you said, and this is why I chose you.

Principal Chandler noticed that a first-year teacher was not displaying the behaviors that she stated in her initial employment interview. Using targeted feedback, Principal

Chandler wanted to make her aware of her behaviors and wanted her to develop her own teaching identity.

Assistant Principal Dreux shared a story about a feedback session with a teacher about his relationship with students. She explained,

> I had a conversation with him just about—but it was more just me and him because he has issues with getting in these power struggles with students. Whenever he's trying to have a conversation with students after they've done something, it can be very degrading and demeaning, and he is one of the—I think this is because of his upbringing is that adults are always right. I say that he is the bell, Ms. Trunchbull from Matilda, he's more of I'm right, you're wrong, I'm big, you're small. That kind of mentality. So I had a conversation with him about avoiding power struggles, because these are children at the end of the day and, you know, she didn't call you a liar. He was like, "So she was basically saying, she didn't say it, which I took it as she's calling me a liar," and I'm like, but she's a child. So some of the things that you're doing, you don't want to make things worse. Sometimes don't say anything, like okay, that's fine. I'm not gonna get in an argument with you. Sometimes, I think, but at the end of the day, as long as you do what I need you to do, she followed your directions. She came with you. She could have been like, shh, I ain't coming with you and went the other way. So she was res—she was responsive, so you have to give her that much, but I understand that you're upset and she got consequences. I don't want to sit there and say she wasn't right, but I wanted him to understand that I supported him as well as I supported the student. But keep in mind that you coming back calling her a liar, I mean, just getting more and more upset could have added fuel to the fire, especially with an African American, some African American males here. So that's one of those situations where I had to mediate, talk to both of them individually and give them some thinking points for the next time. Everything, every action doesn't—there doesn't need to be a reaction.

Assistant Principal Dreux shared feedback with the teacher to help him look at the incident from a different perspective in an effort to restore and repair the relationship between the teacher and the student.

Theme 3: School Leaders Support Teachers Instructionally

School leaders believe a role they play in helping to foster positive teacher-student relationships with middle school students is to support teachers instructionally. Curriculum Facilitator Stanley supports teachers instructionally by assisting with lesson planning and pacing.

> I think many of our teachers who have issues with relationships with kids is because they have issues with classroom management, and they don't know how to handle it. And my personal belief is most classroom management issues come from a lack of planning, and just not good, thorough lesson planning. And I think I can really help with your lesson planning. Are you using a timer? Have you marked out how much you plan for the warmup to be? You said 10 minutes but it took you 30. Like can you stay on track? Can we do lessons that are engaging to kids and not notetaking every day? I'm not saying notetaking's wrong, but we don't do it 5 days a week. So those types of strategies, I think good lesson planning leads to good classroom management, and good classroom management allows you to build relationships.

Curriculum Facilitator Stanley views lesson planning as an essential component to effective classroom management and building relationships.

Assistant Principal Bennett believes that supporting teachers instructionally can help with behavior management.

> Right. I think it's just making sure, Ms. C . . . says all the time, one of the best behavior management tools is a good lesson. So, and we see all the time when we—the moment we get two and three calls from one teacher in a day, we know ain't nothing going on, well nothing's happening in that classroom. So helping teachers get to where they need to be as far as masters of their content, and then how to actually show their con—you know, show what they know about their content, because there's some people that know math, but can't teach math. You know, there is a big difference.

Assistant Principal Bennett believes that when teachers know how to teach their content to students, academics and behavior improve.

Principal Chandler shared her views on the role of the curriculum facilitator on her team.

> So her primary role is to help the teacher with instructional strategies and sometimes with content and delivery because the delivery sometimes is the issue. You can have smart, smart, smart, smart, smart teacher with no personality, no connection, so it is my hope that in those conversations, that the curriculum facilitator is quick and savvy enough to know it's your delivery, it's your facilitation and be able to coach the teacher on why don't you try this strategy because you have happier room with these kind of learners, or can receive instruction this kind of way and that's going to make it more fun or that's going to make it more interesting. But that could be you know, it could be a whole 'nother culture conversation for another kind of class, so my expectation for the CF is to know the teachers and their strengths and their weaknesses, so that they can coach them when or if, because they might—the teacher might not come to them.

Principal Chandler shared that the team's curriculum facilitator is able to determine a teacher's strengths and weaknesses and provide focused instructional support.

Curriculum Facilitator Knox described how she provides instructional support for the beginning teachers at her school:

> Well, I partner with another teacher here, H. J., who's over our BT program. And I think coming in, I'm really, really passionate about beginning teachers, that's something I've had a heavy focus on, I'm thinking about going back to school to kind of get maybe a doctorial pursuit with beginning teachers. So that's kind of my baby. So what we decided to do with BTs this year, each month, we have an instructional focus. And so we provided all kinds of literature, examples, videos, things like that, for a teacher—for BTs around that. So we have a BT breakfast every month and during that breakfast, we provide this PD for them. And through that program we also do instructional walks for our BTs, so they're able to go to some of our master teachers.

Curriculum Facilitator Knox is passionate about providing instructional support for beginning teachers in order to provide them with targeted professional development.

Principal Douglas supports teachers instructionally through direct support from curriculum facilitators. He has two curriculum facilitators—one for reading and one for math:

> One of things that we've done is narrow the focus of our curriculum facilitators, okay, so we have two curriculum facilitators. One is in charge of English, one is in charge of math. That is all they touch, right? And so it allows them just to do what a curriculum facilitator should do, which is spend time with teachers, right. Most curriculums—I'm going to say most curriculum facilitators, and that's a big stereotype, work in offices, right? They work in an office in a school and come out of that office reg—you know, regularly, but it's not to go meet with teachers. It's not to go watch teachers teach and provide feedback. And so I think by narrowing the focus of our CFs, it's allowed them to do that job. What they should do, which is to provide teachers feedback, get in teachers' classrooms, observe lessons, and we've even narrowed it more to where even our CFs don't work with every like, ELA teacher. So, you know, total, we have like seven ELA teachers, they work with four to five, right, because there's been one or two that don't really need the same type of support, so they're in a whole different support plan.

Principal Douglas feels that the direct support provided by the curriculum facilitators allows for targeted instructional support for teachers.

Curriculum Facilitator Stanley supports teachers instructionally by showing teachers how to analyze and effectively use data.

> I'm going to say data and resources, and I think I've mentioned both of those, but showing teachers how to use data effectively, showing them multiple data points, and then understanding something that our data assessment team shared this year and we've used it quite often. It's a picture of a pipe and it says, "This is not a pipe." And—if it is, but the artwork is about this is just a picture. It's not the real thing. So when we look at data, this is just a picture or a part of the kid, it's the

> kid? So you know the kid, and what can these data points help you to make this kid better? But don't forget the kid?

Curriculum Facilitator Stanley wants teachers to be able to use multiple data points to make predictions and develop plans to help students achieve goals.

Principal Chandler provides instructional support by allocating resources for field trips and authentic experiences for students.

> Recently, we just took a group of students to Washington, DC for an educational field trip. It was actually a group of homeless students who probably's never been outside of Glendale, but we were able to get with their language arts and social studies teachers to get them material for why they were there, to look for—certain look-fors when they visited all of the main attractions. So that's another way to support instruction in the classroom.

Providing students with authentic experiences that create memories is a way Principal Chandler supports instruction and engages students in the community around them.

As a way to support teachers instructionally, Principal Douglas allocates resources for teachers to attend professional development based on individual areas for growth and interest.

> I think that I allow them autonomy, so I'm not a big one size fits all. So I think that gets me in trouble sometimes, too, in that, you know, I don't do a lot of whole school stuff. Like I don't believe in whole school PD, doesn't work. So I really allow teachers to find out what they need. Now, that gets me in trouble in that there's some teachers who fall through the cracks, right? There's some teachers who don't get any professional development—I say professional development, I'm thinking of more global professional development. There's always professional development in the school building, right. But, you know, things that are specific, I try to really, I always put money aside for teachers to go to conferences, and I don't assign it, right? Like you come and ask me like, I want to go to this this cool conference in Georgia that's on service learning. Alright, cool. Here you go, you know, I'll approve it, go to it. Because I think that each person

> is individual and they gotta figure out what their needs are to be able to reach their potential. So I think just trying to provide them that autonomy and that flexibility to say, "Hey, this is something I really want to focus on," and then giving them the kind of the roadmap to get there.

Principal Douglas believes in supporting teachers by allowing teachers to seek and attend professional development that will help them achieve their instructional goals.

Curriculum Facilitator Chyna shared that her assistant principal supports teachers instructionally:

> We are both focused on instruction. We are both—well, me personally, and I'm speaking about my AP because I know she is both in the best interest of the student and the teacher because we know when one is off, it's all off. Differences again, they're the heavy, I'm not the heavy. So if there's resistance to me, or to other support, then they are the ones that should address those issues with a firmer hand than I will be able to.

Although Curriculum Facilitator Chyna and her assistant principal both support teachers instructionally, she feels that she is responsible for carrying out the vision of the principal and assistant principal.

Assistant Principal Bennett feels that her previous role as a curriculum facilitator enables her to be able to support teachers instructionally.

> I think it helps because one, I think it helps in every area, because one, they know that I'm there evaluating, and not in a bad way. But they know that I kind of have some power and they know that I know instruction all the same time. They know I'm not bull-jobbing them. So us having that, so I can have I can have a relationship, or I have a relationship with almost every person is this building in some sort of way. I think because I'm not just focused on the—I'm not just focused on them being a staff member at Hatcher, I'm focused on how are you doing instructionally, how are you relating to kids, all that kind of in one. So yeah, I don't think I can separate the CF and AP role in my head. Because to me

> they kind of—I think that's what made my flow easy, my transition easy, because I just—it just come natural.

Assistant Principal Bennett believes that having served in both roles as curriculum facilitator and now assistant principal enables her to be effective in providing instructional support.

Additionally, Assistant Principal Bennett believes that curriculum facilitators are able to support teachers instructionally when they know the students.

> But I think too in a CF role it's also important to know the kids, and know their strengths and weaknesses, and I think sometimes that's overlooked, like I only need to be here to help teachers, you gotta love students in order to be able to help the teachers, so kind of sharing some of those things, some of those methods that they can do to help bridge the gap between instruction and relationship.

Since the curriculum facilitator is a role that traditionally supports teachers, Assistant Principal Bennett feels that the curriculum facilitator who shares the same love and passion for students that teachers have will provide the support teachers need to help students achieve.

Part II:
School Leaders' (Principal, Assistant Principal, and Curriculum Facilitator) Recommended Leadership Strategies for Effectively Fostering Teacher-Student Relationships

Theme 1: School Leaders Recommend That Teachers Engage in Self-reflection

In order to help teachers foster effective teacher-student relationships with middle school students, school leaders recommend that teachers engage in self-reflection. Principal Chandler proposes that leaders have conversations where they discuss data and trends in order for teachers to reflect on and experience moments of self-realization.

> Okay. So there is a specific teacher on staff who oftentimes, for lack of better terms, kick students out of the classroom, and so the students will come straight to me, knowing that they are a middle school student, they could manipulate that and do whatever they like; however, they come to the principal. And they come to me because they know I will listen and so this particular teacher can't seem to understand why they come to the principal and why kicking a student out is not a good practice. Because not only does it go against the systems that we have in place, but it, you know, takes away from the student's right to learn. So I've had to have a conversation with the teacher to give that teacher specific instances because this occurs frequently among many students, not just one student, and it occurs frequently over one gender and one race. And so I've had to show the teacher the number of instances that they have kicked the students out and asked the teacher, "Have you noticed that it is this particular race and this particular gender. Talk to me about that." And so I allow the teacher to discover why this might be an issue. I also pulled out the school-wide expectations for when a student is not doing what they're supposed to do to remind the teacher as to what the proper procedures are, because kicking out is not an option for us at this school. So that's one instance of mediating and so I did explain to the teacher that the students still needs to be successful in the class. This the most recent one, therefore, we had to figure out a reentry. We had to restore that relationship. I said, "You don't have the trust or the respect of this particular student anymore." And coupled with this are parent complaints, and so talking to them about the race and the gender, talking to them about the school-wide expectations, talking to them about the parent lens and how the student feels. And so, those four things in a conversation and making that teacher accountable for a restoration conversation with the student, whether they want it—whether you wanted to or not.

Pointing out school-wide expectations, looking at trends, and bringing awareness to the teachers is how Principal Chandler helps teachers practice self-reflection in regards to building relationships with students.

Additionally, Principal Chandler wants teachers to give students grace by highlighting areas of improvement that teachers themselves have.

> Yeah, and I don't know if this is the best. I don't know if it's the best way of handling it, but oftentimes, I will redirect—I put out grace and I put out the word grace to teachers a lot, and I give them. I give them—I give my teachers a lot of grace. And so I try to remind them about if this same scenario, when I'm talking to them about them, if this same scenario was happening in your classroom, then

> what? You would you would have been fired in October. If you—like you have more zeros than this student has. Right, so I try to use those real-life examples and they'll, you know, they'll come back with well they're kids, and—no, which means you're an adult, which means your—our expectation for you is even higher because you're all adult without all degree. So, I try to use that, too. And sometimes, a lot of times it works. Like you want to write up a student for being late and you're late every day. And here's a lot of text messages because you keep texting me saying you're going to be 5 minutes late, 10 minutes late. This child comes to you a minute late once and you want them to be crucified. So I try to use that a lot. Like—and then, and sometimes they get it.

Assistant Principal Bennett also shares the same practice as Principal Chandler and points out areas for improvement as a way for teachers to reflect on their relationships with students.

> Connect it back to them and their needs. I remind them, like, again, I try to be very open and honest, especially with the ones I know I can be open honest with. So I had a tea—I have one teacher, sixth-grade math teacher Ms. S. . . ., that loves to yell and bless out kids all the time, and I—and so when she's late, and I try to use my sense of humor, so—and I, fact that we have a relationship, so when she's late, I'm like, remember when you yelled at B. . . . last week, and she's like "Okay, I'm a do better, do better." And so sometimes you see using that and doing that and reminding them that they need grace, too, so they need to be sensitive to students.

Assistant Principal Bennett likes to remind teachers to be sensitive to student needs as she tries to be sensitive to teacher needs.

Assistant Principal Dreux recommends that teachers observe the interactions that colleagues have with students they share:

> So she can say anything to this student, but her ELA teacher, because Ms. S. teaches science, the ELA teacher struggles with her in a way to where the student has said some things and she's like, that's not okay. Why? So I'm like, "Well, have you called the parent, have you—reach out to Ms. S. because Ms. S. has a really great relationship with her." She won't talk to her. And so it's like this

> competitiveness, I don't know what it is, because at M., if I had a situation with a child, what are you doing? Yeah, what can I do, because I am struggling. But it's like some people need to devel—eat some humble pie in this, in our cul—in this school culture and say, "I don't know all the answers." What, you know, and I don't know if it's because of the years that they've put in and they feel like they've arrived and they don't have to ask for help, and so I think that regarding culture, and this is for everything, this is for our ELA committee, this is for SOAR, our discipline committee, this is for everything, we've got to be more collaborative and say, I have a issue with a student, what do you do with that student? So that is a culture that we need to move toward. We have a lot of great teachers, and we have, like I'm talking decades of experience in this school, but I feel like also people don't know how to just eat some humble pie or say, "I don't have all the answers, what do you do with this student?"

Assistant Principal Dreux wants teachers to be vulnerable and able to learn from others in the building. She feels that this strategy may not be effective at her current school due to competitiveness and pride among teachers; however, she believes that this strategy was effective at a previous school.

Assistant Principal Dreux also uses grade-level meetings as a platform to discuss discipline disproportionality data.

> Lately, I've done it more generally. And I say that because I had a conversation with the grade level about some of the kids that they are referring to me, some of the kids that come to my office, and since this is my topic of work, you know, I know that our discipline, you know, has Black students in my office referred way more substantially than White students. Not saying they're actually doing these things more than White students, but they're being referred. So I told the teachers that just because—listen, just because Black students are coming to my office don't mean they're doing more. White students are doing this too, they're just not getting caught. And they do it quieter. That's why. And that's what I told them, and I said, so whenever you are in—you know, keep in mind that whenever you're in your classroom and stuff like that, make sure that you are seeing all of your students, because there are a lot of White students that are doing stuff in your classes and they're not getting caught. So just doing it more generally. I'm still trying to figure this out, because it bothers me to my core.

After Principal Dreux presents discipline data to her team, she hopes that teachers will reflect on the referrals submitted and pay attention to the behaviors of all students in their classrooms.

Assistant Principal Sage also uses the team approach to encourage teachers to practice self-reflection:

> "Well, no, what I need you to do is have maybe the whole team can come together," a group—a team of teachers can come together with that one student and have a restorative circle because what happens is a lot—most times out of four teachers, one teacher could be having issues with that one kid and other three are cool, and so that is revealed in those restorative circles and so that can be a Aha! moment for the teacher as well is like, "Okay, what are they doing that I'm not doing?" And so—or vice versa, "What am I doing? Am I fussing the kid out? Am I correcting him in front of the kids or do I need—in front of class or do I need to pull the kids aside to correct him, so."

By implementing restorative circles as a team, Assistant Principal Sage believes this method is a way for teachers to recognize the behaviors that may be causing a strained relationship, as well as learn from others who have a positive relationship with the student.

Principal Douglas shares this belief about teacher self-reflection:

> You know, and so I tell people all the time, it's about you in the relationship. Now, are there bad days? Yes. And are they kids, of course they are, I mean, there's going to be ups and downs. But I say to—a lot of times, 90% of my kids, and I—probably more than that, I could ask them to run into traffic for me. And they would do it. Not because I asked them, but because they care about me. Because they know I wouldn't ask them to do something that doesn't have meaning behind it. And so I think as a teacher, you have to be introspectively reflective, that's some word I just made up, but you have to reflecting on yourself. Because if you're having the problems the common denominator is you, it's not the kid, if you're having a problem in every single class it's not your classes' problem, it's you. But getting people to understand that because especially older

> teachers think well, I'm the teacher, I'm the adult they should respect me. Well, that's not how our generation—this generation of students works, you have to give them something to earn their respect. And once you get it, I mean, it's pretty hard to break. I mean kids are resilient, and kids will love you, even when you spit in their face, unfortunately. But you've got to build that with kids, and you gotta build that trust and that love and that respect. And if you don't do it, it's gonna be a really long year in your class.

In Principal Douglas's opinion, teachers should take ownership of behavior management issues in their classrooms and work to build relationships with students.

Principal Kynnedy uses the teacher evaluation tool as a way for teachers to reflect on ways to build their professional capacity.

> I think first a lot of it is to ask them to think about what type of teacher do they want to be, going back and looking at the standards and making sure that they understand what an accomplished teacher is. So helping them build that capacity is to recognize just because you are national board once, you went through those checkboxes doesn't mean that you get to keep that, so we're still kind of fighting the whole yeah, all of that stuff.

Principal Kynnedy believes that making teachers aware of areas for growth will help build teacher's capacity and allow teachers to reflect on the changes that will brand them as a proficient teacher based on the teacher evaluation instrument.

Curriculum Facilitator Chyna describes the reason for her focus for teacher self-reflection on the use of deficit language.

> This year, I've been focused—I was introduced to what's called deficit language and deficit mindset. So limiting students based on their backgrounds or their circumstance. So this year I've done a lot of challenging thoughts and comments. So if someone comes in and says, oh—or we're talking about instruction, and someone says, "Oh, this group is so low, or those kids are so low," so transforming that into this is my group with the most growth opportunity. So

> changing the way they think about and they talk about our students has been a big factor for me this year.

Curriculum Facilitator Chyna wants teachers to focus on using positive language with students in order to build relationships.

Assistant Principal Sage shares the same sentiment as Curriculum Facilitator Chyna concerning redirecting teachers from using deficit language and reflecting on personal implicit bias in reference to students.

> That is a very, very, very good question. Um, so in the beginning of the year, and we did fall all, we were doing growth mindset training that I was facilitating, we are still in that vein, we're more talking about culture, building the school culture, and so I would say just in terms of that implicit bias, shining light on it. By me not—I don't directly say "Hey, you got some biases there," but through the training, the growth mindset training, it allows them to be more self-reflecting and using deficit language and stuff like that, we talk about deficit language and things like that, so that's kind of area that we definitely need to continue to work on. Of course, the district provides their training, but, you know, got to teach them to take it seriously.

Assistant Principal Sage wanted teachers to reflect on how using deficit language and awareness of implicit biases can have a positive or negative effect on school culture and relationships.

Curriculum Facilitator Knox wants teachers to use positive language with students:

> Yeah. And then I really—and I think the—on a smaller level I kind of attack verbiage, like when you say, when we're looking at data, especially when—after interims and we looked at data, and they would say, "Well, this class did really good, you know, that's my inclusion class so they not going to do good, and I'm like, but they could grow. So I always try to say kids can grow. There's a celebration in anything, even if a kid had 20%, what did they have before, if they

> came in with a 10 and they now have a 12, this is celebration. So it may not be what you want, but we're going to celebrate our kids, and so I always try to pull out the positive in everything, so I think that my biggest—and just correct verbiage. I really don't like to hear them kids or those kids by the stage? I hate that. So just trying to be inclusive as possible.

Curriculum Facilitator Knox helps teachers self-reflect on their demeanor toward certain groups of students by re-directing teachers to use positive language and celebrate small successes of students.

Principal Kynnedy likes to help her teachers talk through situations and develop viable solutions to issues on their own.

> Because if they are telling me a series of problems or issues, then my job as a problem-solver is to help you figure out what you can do differently. Because I'm not gonna move the kid out of your class. I can't—an EC label is not going to fix them, they're still going to be your child, so I think that's about building their capacity, is giving them a chance to talk through what their issues are, and then empower them.

Once a teacher has developed a plan of action to tackle a situation, Principal Kynnedy offers her support in order to restore the relationship.

Principal Kynnedy wants her teachers to practice self-reflection in order to be culturally sensitive.

> Yeah, yeah, so that's something that when we talk about, who is it, and there's a couple of teachers that come to mind who don't seem to see culturally that some kids' loud voices are not them being disrespectful. And so it's really just putting that out. And then again, it goes back to how we structure teams. That kid isn't doing that in every classroom, so what's happening? Right, right. And so putting that out there, but also just being blatant to say he's just being loud. Is he being disrespectful? So ask, but putting those questions back. Put all those questions back on them.

Based on Principal Kynnedy's insight, teachers may view the behaviors that students display and respond appropriately when they are knowledgeable of the "hidden rules" of cultures.

Assistant Principal Dreux prefers to highlight the misconceptions teachers may have of student behaviors.

> I think I do a lot of—for the ones who struggle, I do a lot of giving lens, like I said, giving lens to different people, like giving that different lens to teachers that struggle. Now there are a lot of teachers on this hallway who do great, and to be honest, I don't have a lot of behavioral issues, and the ones I have come from the same teachers, so giving them, just here's a lens of compassion.

Assistant Principal Dreux wants teachers to be culturally sensitive and show compassion for students by having them look as situations from a different perspective or lens.

Curriculum Facilitator Stanley uses the teaching and learning from the districts' equity training as a catalyst for conversation.

> I think a lot of it comes through the district's equity training. But I think it gives a good catalyst for conversation. I think sometimes it's hard to just bring it up in general, so the fact that the district has set those types of expectations and some common language, then you can bring up, "Hey, I was in your classroom today. Have you thought about?" You know, thinking about that training we went through? Have you thought about how this looks? So I think some of those things allow for conversations to develop quicker and easier.

After classroom observations, Curriculum Facilitator Stanley uses language and examples from the training as she poses critical questions regarding equity and implicit bias to teachers.

Principal Chandler shares the following story about how and why she practices administrator self-reflection:

> And so I have to be transparent enough to share that experience as an example with staff to say, "Hey guys, guess what? Today this particular incident happened. And I'm sharing this with you because I know we all have it." So I think it happens more than we want to admit and so in order to deal with it, you have to be transparent and say, oh snap, like I messed up, or that might not have been a good thing to say or a good thing to think. But I think just knowing that it exists is important and admitting, yeah, I might have some implicit biases.

Principal Chandler makes it a point to practice self-reflection to be aware of her own biases as she models the behavior for her teachers. She is transparent to her staff about her own biases and is intentional about her interactions with all staff and students.

Assistant Principal Dreux believes in practicing administrator self-reflection as well:

> But to be—but I have to check my own biases. Because see, I naturally pay attention to certain kids, and I have to check my own self, like it's naturally, and I think it's just the—I don't know, I think it's just the human part of in us and our relatability. I'm a naturally go to black kids saying, I just, I'm a naturally go to Black—Black kids naturally come to my office, I just—I just do. I'm not going—and so now I have to check myself and make sure I talk to the White kids.

Assistant Principal Dreux also was aware of her own biases and works to intentionally interact and build relationships with all students.

Curriculum Facilitator Chyna uses critical conversations as a tool for teacher self-reflection.

> I think serving as their mirror, because sometimes it's difficult for us to see ourselves. And to see what we do, so I do a lot of taking low inference notes on

> my observations of them in class or with other students, so that it doesn't come across as a judgment, but this is what I'm seeing, this is what's being seen, in giving them a map to navigate how to better approach certain situations, but just serving as their reflection tool.

Like Principal Kynnedy, Curriculum Facilitator Chyna provides teachers with observation data in order for teachers to be cognizant of how others view what is occurring in the classroom. Additionally, Curriculum Facilitator Chyna likes to provide strategies and suggestions on how to handle situations that occur in the classroom.

Principal King uses critical conversations as a way to be open and honest to teachers about what he observes:

> That is a tough one. I think just having conversations, I think back to a teacher that I had here at the middle school my first year. And I just had a conversation with her, I mean I literally just sat her down and said, "Do you even like your job?" like those were my exact words to her, like do you even like your job and do you even want to be a teacher? Because her biases were massive, and everybody knew it. But no one would call it what it was. And so I think just having those hard conversations. Now, does that happen all the time, no. Are there times where I know something's going on, and I keep trying to find a way to address it, and I don't, of course, so don't get it wrong, that just because I didn't want to it's perfect. It's a tough thing, yeah, and it's very hard and I think coming from a White male makes it even more difficult sometimes to have conversations about explicit or implicit bias. It's very hard. And there's no easy way to have those conversations.

Principal Douglas believes that in order to meet the needs of students, open and honest conversations help teachers reflect about their relationships with students.

In agreement with Principal Douglas, Curriculum Facilitator Knox believes in holding critical conversations with teachers to promote equity and inclusion:

> That has been a hard one. Whole scale, during our ILT walkthroughs where we had to go through every classroom in the school, we noticed that we had one teacher, a Hispanic teacher, who had all the African American students sitting in the back of the room. And it was very hard to have that conversation. When we had it, though, he was like, I didn't realize that that's what it was, he was like all the kids were sitting with their friends, and they just migrated towards the back. But when we spoke to the students, the students were like, we assigned—he assigned us the seats. And so—and be frank, we caught him on his BS and we—we were like, this is not gonna happen, you know, our kids deserve all—they deserve to be treated fairly, they deserve to not have to be in school and deal with things that—this is a safe place, and we're gonna keep it a safe place. So it was a hard conversation to have because, you know, as a mother, you think what if this is my kid, and as a passionate educator you just get angry.

Curriculum Facilitator Knox's passion for inclusive education was the spark to ignite the hard conversation with her teacher about the seating arrangements in the classroom. The conversation served as both a reflection tool for the teacher, and a way to promote inclusive education for all students.

Theme 2: School Leaders Recommend That Teachers Care About Their Students

In order to foster effective teacher-student relationships with middle school students, school leaders recommend that teachers care about their students. Principal Chandler believes that teachers care about their students when they develop good relationships with the families of students.

> I think school culture is bigger than the students and the staff because when you reach families, if mom knows that their baby is happy at the school, that impacts school culture. And if you have a good relationship with mom and dad and auntie and grandma, and them, all of them.

Assistant Principal Dreux shares a story of a teacher she feels genuinely cares about her students:

> Yes, so I—we have a sixth-grade teacher that works here. And she used to teach social studies. She teaches math now, she's really, a really effective math teacher. And I'm over eighth grade, so a lot of my teachers talk about—a lot of my students talk about this teacher still to this day, like this is one of their favorite teachers. And I think it's just because she knows how to relate to kids, she's very compassionate. She treats them as individuals. One of the first things she does every year is tells them to bring in a baby picture because their classroom is everybody's classroom. So she'll come, she'll tell them to bring in a baby picture and when you go in, you'll see a whole bunch of baby pictures, kid pictures around her room, because she wants them to feel like that's their class, too. She doesn't yell, she's really soft-spoken, if she needs to have conversation with you she'll talk to you out in the hallway. So that really resonated with a lot of the kids. Some of the kids who constantly get in trouble, or who have constantly got in trouble have called the—have called her their mom, one in particular, who is always in my office. She's just like, "Oh, can I go to my mom's, you know, my mom's classroom? That's my mom." So she really has a positive relationship. She has talked to me about how she was adopted, how she—how she wasn't—she was in the system. And so I think there's a part of her that can relate to not having a lot, the struggle with some of her kids. So she's telling her kids if I can make it, all of y'all can make it. So there's a lot of compassion. There's a lot of relatability with her. And I think she just has a great spirit, and kids can feel that she truly cares for them.

Assistant Principal Dreux described how the teacher shows that she cares about her students by creating a classroom environment that is nurturing and a safe space for students. Because of her own personal background, the teacher was able to show compassion for her students.

Assistant Principal Bennett also described a story about how a teacher creates a safe space for students as a way to show students he cares about them.

> Mr. C., yeah, but—and he plays two roles, he plays a good role because he does way too much for kids. Like he'll sit and mediate a group of 15 girls for 3 hours, like nobody else in the world wants to do that, ever, but he loves it, it like feeds his spirit. On the bad side, I won't say bad side, but on the side that we have a challenge with is that students always want to go to him. So ISS is not supposed to be a good place. But sometimes it ends up being a kid's safe place, they want to go to ISS to be with Mr. C.

Assistant Principal Bennett describes how the in-school suspension teacher created a safe and caring environment in a place that is meant to be punitive. He spent extra time to ensure that strained relationships among peers were restored.

Curriculum Facilitator Chyna claims that teachers can show students they care in the following ways:

> Intentional relatability. Asking them beyond—asking about them beyond school life. Calling home not to just say negative things, but to start off with praising them, or what they're doing right. Caring about what we consider their little problems, like their little beefs and their little dramas.

Curriculum Facilitator Chyna also agreed that there are many more ways that teachers care about their students.

Principal Chandler noted that teachers should show students they care by attending their events and building relationships beyond the classroom.

> Athletics. Athletics, band, concerts, chorus, orchestra, that means a lot to our students and our families. If you are present for them outside of the classroom, or if you—even if you can't be present and you know they got first place in band or first place in orchestra or did a great job at something, saying that to them, saying that to their parents mean the world to them, and so we—I think we have a pretty good—we know that about our students, we have a pretty good majority of staff that are always cheerleading for our students. But I think just showing up to baseball games, showing up to softball games, coming to see them perform in a concert is key here.

When teachers attend student events, Principal Chandler believes that students as well as parents feel that teachers care about their interests.

Curriculum Facilitator Stanley stated that teachers care about students when they set high expectations for them:

> I think another thing that a teacher does is setting high expectations. I think high expectations of a kid not getting away with something like this work isn't good enough. I need you to do this again because I know you can do better. That, to me, a child's going to see it, ah, she's making me do this again, yes, you're going to get the huff because we work with teenagers, but it also shows them this person cares about me, they're not just taking what I'm given, they have confidence in me that I can do better.

Curriculum Facilitator Stanley feels that teachers care about their students by holding students accountable for their actions and behavior.

Principal Chandler affirms that teachers demonstrate care for their students by involving the student in the larger community and forming partnerships.

> That goes back to me, it goes back to the school culture is bigger than in the school building, it's community, it's volunteers, partnerships. We have—our school is newly renamed. The person that it's named after, was affiliated with all kinds of community groups, so you engage [fraternity] you engage the alumni of H., you engage A. sports, you engage the church, you engage everybody that he was a part of. If they say, "Oh, M., so I went to school with M." Okay, well what, you know, if you ever want to partner with us, we'd be happy to have you. And bam, they show up at the door. His wife recently passed away. Instead of flowers, the granddaughter said, send the check—send checks to the school. That's culture, that climate, they're supporting incentives for the students. So every student that made honor roll, the ice cream truck comes, and then they pay for that. The K. are coming next Friday to do a luncheon for all eighth-grade boys just because the name of the school is M., and we said, "Let us know how you can help." They're coming to do a whole etiquette luncheon for the boys. Some random person shows up with 100 neckties for the boys. And like they just show up, people just show up because everybody in the building is—has the best interest for the school, so they're—it's, I'm one person, but me times 70 others talking to people in the community about the great things at this school times the students and their parents and most of them have two parents and they have a grandma and they have an auntie and an uncle, so.

Principal Chandler shared another example of how teachers showed students in the community they care after a tornado impacted a neighborhood in which the majority of the students she serves lived.

> So our—again, I'll mention that—I mean, there are different parent groups and parent and community groups already attached to school, but I can remember specifically our—one of our main neighborhoods that a lot of our kids that we serve come from, and the area were impacted by a tornado last semester last year and it was devastating and unexpected. And so I have a good group of staff who's just caring individuals and getting calls and text messages the night—the evening that it happened and what can we do? What can we do, because that's—that is just the culture of the school. We always want to figure out how we can help support our families. In addition to the school district providing free lunches at the school throughout this terrible process we were all at school the next morning, I sent something out that night. "Hey, hope everybody, you know, is well, hope your family's are good. If you are come to the school in the morning, let's devise a plan. We're gonna hit the streets." And we had a majority of staff here. And we didn't know what we were going to do. All we knew is our kids need our help. That's all we knew. And so the first step was let's hit the streets. Let's go over there, and we went to . . ., and just got our tennis shoes on and coats and jackets and was walking, knocking door to door. "Everything okay here? What do y'all need?" Go on to the next door, "What's going on over here?" We got with the resident assistant, the housing manager, we got with other local agencies, barber shops, the convenience store that was on the corner. Different other schools, like I can remember everybody was contacting me, contacting us to see, how can we help, how can we help? So we had this—then once I knew that people were willing to help and I said okay, I need a contact person for this, I need a contact person for meals, I need a contact person for clothes. So then start delegating, who was going to be over what? Then there were a group of teachers who said we want to cook every night until—for these families. So we got—everybody started Cash apping, collecting money. We got hot dogs, we got grills, we got slaw, we got chili, we got drinks. We went out there, we grilled every night for them for at least a week. They knew where to come. And we got the words out to the feeder schools because our students' siblings either go to . . ., so I contacted the principals of those schools, said, "Hey, we're going to be at this barbershop from six to nine every evening this week with hot dogs, hamburgers, and drinks. Let your families know, or help us get the word out, or do you want to join us. And so that's one specific example. We collected clothes and water bottles for months. Kids knew that they could come here to get what they needed.

The teachers at Principal Chandler's school wanted to show they cared about their students amidst a powerful storm. Principal Chandler and her staff responded by going into the local community to provide resources to students and families in need. Her teachers empowered others to serve the students and families as well.

Theme 3: School Leaders Recommend That Teachers Use Strategies to Build Relationships with Their Students

In order to foster effective teacher-student relationships with middle school students, school leaders recommend that teachers use specific strategies to build relationships with their students. Principal Chandler shares how one of her teachers builds relationships with her students:

> I'll do H. H. has amazing relationships with students. She's not an over the top kind of charismatic teacher, but I think she has good relationships with students because she spends a significant amount of time getting to know students in the beginning of the school year. So for instance, I think about the beginning of the school year, knowing that her standards and her units were important to launch for language arts, even with that, she took a lot of time asking kids about themselves doing a lot of interest surveys, a lot inventories on students asking kids about what's important to them, asking them about their home life but not in a invasive way. And I heard about it through students talking in the hallways, and how they would tell each other, Miss J. really is interested in getting to know me. And so I heard about it from students, which gave me the information to go into the classroom to see it for myself. And so going into her classroom, I noticed that she's spending a lot of one-on-one time so that built the stage for when it was time for those academic conversations later in the year, she already knew, or if it was time for them to pick out their independent reading text or their home reading texts, she knew about—she knows every student because she's up front spent time getting to know them as a child and as an individual. So she is one that I would say has great relationships with students because she knows them as individuals.

Principal Chandler described a teacher who focuses on building academic relationships in order to help determine a student's need for intervention. Principal Chandler adds that a

simple gesture such as greeting students at the door with a smile helps to build relationships:

> I think something as simple as standing at the door and greeting students every day by their name. It sounds small and simple, but that's something I think people wouldn't think of using as a strategy. But I know one particular teacher, Ms. B., she stands at her door every day with a smile and says hello to every single child.

Assistant Principal Sage attests that a teacher believed he was successful at building relationships with his students because he knew what motivated them by getting to know them beyond the classroom:

> Okay, because our kids—our current eighth-grade students are projected to not pass, none of them, so our proficiency projections were like zero percent. Interim number two that just finished 42% of our eighth graders passed the interim. And I asked him, I said, "So what contributed to that success?" and he said, "Well, part of it was what I told him to do was to get to know the kids outside of the classroom," like, you know, he goes to their games, he goes to their concerts, he reaches out to their parents, he really—and then he works with them. He just had that natural relationship with kids, get to know them beyond who they are outside the classroom, so—as a result, the—oh, he find, also he said that he found out what motivates them. So what motivates them, whether it's Biscuitville or Bojangles, or a sticker, you know, so he found out what motivates them and used that to get them to do what he needed them to do.

Being inquisitive about her teachers' success, Assistant Principal Sage wanted to find out what contributed to the increase in proficiency. To her surprise, it did not have anything to do with academics; rather, it was building relationships with students and finding out what motivates them.

Curriculum Facilitator Knox offered this relationship building strategy to help students become accountable for their assessment data:

> Well we actually list all the kids on index cards, and then we had like a sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade line and then we let them go, they had like a minute and they had to draft, it's just like the NFL draft. And then they were able to trade, and so like, no, oh, I'm going to trade in, oh, you can be this one, I'll take this one. But it was based on the existing relationships that they have with kids, with kids they know, they get along with, and the way that we were able to really get the teachers hyped about it was Ms . . . and I made a video of kids talking about the teachers that they really liked the most, and the teacher and why it benefits them to hear about their data. And one student who everybody knows, like if you, you know, if you see him, you know, yes, he made about four or five teachers cry when he talked about the teachers that he really love in the school and how they helped him. And they got everybody hyped and ready to go. We showed it prior to the draft, before we even said anything about what we were doing we showed that video.

The emotional appeal of the video motivated teachers to want to help students develop ownership of and accountability for their achievement data.

Principal Kynnedy plainly addressed how classroom environment and relationships can positively affect achievement data as she describes one of her teachers:

> So that's very easy, the first teacher comes to mind is a sixth-grade teacher that we have here. She is in her probably close to 30 years' experience. Math teacher, she's been here for 11 years. She is everybody's favorite teacher. And when you go into the classroom, you know why. She—you walk into her classroom and every student has multiple pictures of themselves from when they were a toddler, when they were in early elementary school, she asks all of them to bring in three of their favorite pictures from being a kid and she has picture frames. So when you walk into her room, there's—it's littered with kids photos. So every kid in her classroom has at least two or three pictures of themselves in the classroom as a child. And so they—they walk in, and they know that this is home, they know this is where—this teacher cares enough about me to know what did I look like as a baby and what did I look at? And so to pick that out, so I think that day one and she sends that letter before kids come in photographs, be thinking about these pictures. And so she's collected frames, and people have given her frames. But day one the kids walk in, and they see themselves on the wall, so it doesn't even have to wait to develop, it's there day one. She loves all of her kids. She doesn't always have all the easiest kids, but she loves them all and you would never know who was her favorite or who's her least favorite. And then she holds all of her kids accountable. And she treats them like they're her kids. She praises them,

> she loves them, she corrects them, but they know that they can always tell Miss T. anything they need to. And then she's a phenomenal math teacher because now that I know you, I know you can do better than this. You're a really star baseball player because she's seen something in a picture player, she's seen something. And she tells them all that this is a place—I'm going to see you make mistakes, but I have to see you do something to make a mistake. Then once I see that mistake, we can correct it. So she starts with that foundation of that relationship and then she builds it into the mathematics. So the class, by the first week, kids are comfortable making mistakes and correcting themselves and correcting each other because they know that's the only way that they're going to get better. But that starts back with that relationship. And her EVAAS data is 11 and 12. I mean, it's 11 and 12, it's 11 and 12 consistently, and so she's one of those fun people when you get to go give the checks to say you are the top 25% of the state, you're the top—and I will go (whispers) you are really the top 1%, because she is, she is that phenomenal math teacher.

Principal Kynnedy explains that her teachers hold their students accountable and also that they create a safe space for students to make and learn from their mistakes. Principal Kynnedy stated that there is a warm feeling in the teacher's classroom. Displaying pictures of her former students was an indication of relationships she has built with them.

Curriculum Facilitator Knox describes a teacher who creates a comfortable environment for students as a way to build relationships with her students.

> Her classroom is the place where everybody goes to chill when she doesn't have a class. So she has several of the mushroom chairs. She has the Ottomans where you can put your feet up, she has a couple of little mini couches, very limited traditional seating. She does have a few tables and regular chairs, but when you go in her room on any given day, the kids are with their—they have their feet up and they're sitting in the chairs, they're laying on pillows or beanbag chairs and they're—she has class from the area. So she uses lamps, she doesn't have all the big lights, there are pictures of all of her past students, and not just pictures likes headshots, they're action shots of them working, pictures with them with her jumping on their back, and different things like that. Like you can see the love in the pictures. And she has student work from years ago. So you can tell that she loves her kids, and she cares about her kids because you can see it on her walls.

From Curriculum Facilitator Knox's perspective, the teacher's physical classroom environment is a testament to the relationships the teacher builds with her students.

Curriculum Facilitator Stanley builds relationships with students through the use of social media.

> I also reach out for PTSA and reach out through social media. So yeah, so one of the things that I have done is like let me take on Facebook. I know, personally, I probably stay on Facebook too often, it's like my entertainment, yes, this is a lot of entertainment, yes. It's mind numbingness. But also in seeing what good we can put out with school, how we highlight students, how we highlight things that teachers are doing, to put it out in the community, things that we put in our newsletters, something else is the TV. I was in a building and it was like why are we not using our TVs kind of thing? So I found out we didn't use our TVs because of energy efficiency, yes. Back in the day that they didn't want to run the TVs. Okay, so at least I understand that was the culture. However, how else are we going to highlight some of our students, if we don't—if we say an announcement, but that's a 10-second blurb in the morning compared to pictures of what they're doing and what fun they had at the field trip and who was recognized here, so that became kind of a passion of let's show what we're doing so some of what shows in the school also get shown on, on Facebook, yeah.

Curriculum Facilitator Stanley recognizes the importance of positive school marketing and public relations for increasing relationships with parents and the community.

Curriculum Facilitator Knox spoke to the establishment of a house system as a school-wide relationship-building strategy.

> I first—I think our first big push was through the house system. So when we—each student was able to play a little game so that they could know what house they would be in, and so we built camaraderie through our house colors and competition and stuff like that. And I think with that we've had basketball games with house versus house, and we're coming up on a kickball game that we'll do right before testing with the different houses, so we've had different competitions, and then each house has a service learning project that they were working on.

Curriculum Facilitator Knox indicated that the house system is an age-appropriate strategy to use with middle school students and served as a way to engage in friendly competition and build positive relationships.

Principal Douglas discerns that relationship-building strategies should be culturally responsive:

> I mean I think that's what school culture is, I think, you know, the more culturally competent and responsive you get, the better your kids can be adjusted in class, the better relationships your teachers have with students. So I think it allows you to further that mission. I think that—I mean I think all that's at the forefront and the basis of school culture too, you gotta, you know, I think that's one thing, again, I think I've learned is that school culture is just as important as the letter grade. But we don't talk about it enough. It's just kind of this unknown thing over here. But really, it's just as important as how kids are doing than just math, science, and social studies.

For instance, Principal Douglas shared,

> Yeah, so I think this is going to be funny sitting here. So I think it would be one of my former assistant principals, Ms. S. and her relationship with K. G., a student. Because it was not just assistant principal-to-student, right, like there was a personal connection, like K. could be the worst student ever, but when K. came back her and Ms. S. were still friends and still play acquaintances and it wasn't personally but there was also you break the rules here's the consequences. You have to understand that and so like when I think of overarching, like that's a relationship that I think of like assistant principal-student that was culturally responsive, like Ms. S. knew there were days that K. was going to act a fool and that was the product of the environment that she came from and no matter how great of a school we are, like when that's what you go home to, that's what you're going to come back the next day as. And so like knowing that K. a needed a few minutes every morning, knowing that, you know, she needed to be in this leadership position to help out around the school. But yeah, she was one of the worst kids we had in the building, and that—sometimes that didn't work, right. Like sometimes that caused even more anxiety on everybody, but that it provided K. this opportunity in the mornings to kind of—oh yeah, I'm back at school, this is my safe place, right? This is I don't have to act the way I act at home here I think is a perfect example, like if you were to video-record it, would be a great

> example of culturally responsive, of relationship building, and all those types of things.

Dr. Douglas claimed that being aware of the usually imperceptible issues a student may have and using culturally responsive strategies that help to combat negative social interactions are keys to maintaining positive relationships.

Theme 4: School Leaders Recommend That Teachers Engage Students During Instruction

In order to foster effective teacher-student relationships with middle school students, school leaders recommend that teachers engage students during instruction. For example, Curriculum Facilitator Chyna suggested, "integrating their likes into the content, using them as positive examples in content discussion. Choosing tasks or books or articles that are specific to what they've expressed to you that they're interested in."

Principal Chandler shared an example of how her art teachers formed community partnerships in order to provide an engaging lesson for her students:

> Oh, I just—I think in one from art classroom, actually, and I know this is not like, it doesn't—it's not considered like a core instructional class, but in art I walked in and it was this green cloth set up a whole camera, computers, everything, these random people, didn't even know it was happening, and it was a company out of High Point that's a marketing company for businesses who came in and showed students different jobs that they could have through art by being an artist, and how they take a regular piece of art and make it into a marketing product. And allow kids to come up one by one to get in front of the green screen and do a little snippet or dance, and then show them how to combine all of their little dances into one commercial with their artwork that they had just produced. And that doesn't sound a lot that the teacher did, but the teacher who did all the prework leading up to that, so then the teacher redirecting them back to the standards about the artwork standards that went with—the graphic standards that went with what the company came and did, so real life, bringing real life work jobs, way to, because some kids—a lot of kids don't sign up for art. Art is sometimes a course—you have about half of the kids who want to be in art and half of the kids

> who that's what art fit in their schedule. So for that group that's not necessarily there because they wanted to be, I felt like it tapped into a whole 'nother group 'cause I heard about it so much from parents and they did a whole video, they sent us the link and we shared it with the parents. So they were able to see how you do all these little different snippets and put it all together to make one marketing video, and that's just one profession that you can do through art being an artist.

As described by Principal Chandler, establishing community partnerships allowed students to make connections to real-world careers that incorporate art.

Assistant Principal Dreux provides teachers with culturally relevant resources in order to engage students through instruction.

> I will, depending on the unit, I will provide some, just especially some culturally relevant, culturally based resources for them. Some—like if they're doing some poetry, make sure that they have that Langston Hughes or chooses the books that might really push kids to think, and I'll give them an example just because I used to do a book club and it was we read the Hate You Give and we read Monday's Not Coming, and I had a lot of conversation with the group and it was because they were interested because we were reading books with characters that looked like them, and so I told them, I said, you know, "If you really want to pull your kids, especially your students, your Black student, your Hispanic students, that we need to start utilizing resources that look like them," so pull in the music, you teach ELA, pull in the music. I sent some—I sent one of our teachers some Jay-Z lyrics to something and I was like use it, but he didn't know how—like he didn't know—he was like how would I? And I'm like see, that's what you have to figure out, but I just want to at least give you the—lead you to the water, you know.

Similarly to Assistant Principal Dreux, Principal Kynnedy encourages teachers to explain their reasoning for incorporating culturally relevant resources into lessons.

> But they're pulling out more things and being very deliberate to hit a variety of authors and then talk about it, not just pull them out, like my music teachers, they're not just pulling out different global pieces, but they're also talking about the structure of the music or the composer of it and being very deliberate to say this is why I'm exposing you this to this material and this music there. So it's not

> just that you're putting it in somebody's face, but you're letting them know why. And then also, I think the piece that we forget is being responsive as to what are we responding to culturally relevant and responsive? That it's not the same thing for every group of kids that you're in front of.

Being cognizant of all students, Principal Kynnedy believes that a teacher should allow students to engage in instruction from different insights, experiences, and perspectives.

Curriculum Facilitator Knox challenges teachers to take risks and step out of their comfort zones in order to engage students through instruction.

> Yes. So one teacher I went to was Ms. G., she's our reading impact teacher and I went in her room and she was doing stations. And one thing that I really loved about that Ms. G. does not like stations, she was like no, that's not for me, that's not what this class is set up for. But I challenged her, Ms. H. and I both challenged her to try stations and this was our first time trying it. They were flawless, her stations were flawless. I happened to go into her sixth-grade group and she had three independent student stations and one teacher-led station. And her teacher-led station the kids were going through word fluency and she was boosting them up, praising them for their celebrations from last week on the number of words, recognitions, they've increased. And then she had one group of students, they were doing a reading selection on—it was, she at one reading selection on Nicki Minaj, one on Cardi B, the third one, well the third one they had to compare and contrast the compare and contrast the two artists, and then they got to write a statement to say which artist that they prefer and why. And I just saw just being able to see, like she had their names highlighted on like big neon type posterboard saying Cardi B station, Nicki Minaj station. Right, and they were like, "in Ms. G's class?" And so they were really into it, and it was crazy, because when she would take a break and everybody transitioned, she was like, you know, when I read about Nicki Minaj I was surprised to learn that she was from the Bronx, I have two family members that live there now and they live around the corner from where she grew up. And so she had pre-read the stuff and she was ready to have some conversations with the kids, and they was looking—their eyes were big and they were like, "Ms. G., you know about Nicki Minaj," du du du du du. So the kids were really into it and then she also had just like if you favorite station, it was some vocabulary matching type of activities for them to do, so I was really, really excited to see that one because it was Ms. G. trying something new and taking on a challenge and too she was relating to what the kids listen to, who they talk about, and things like that.

Curriculum Facilitator Knox's illustration describes the impact of a teacher taking risks and their willingness to step out of their comfort zones to engage students. The students will forever have a memory of that lesson planned by that particular teacher.

Similarly to Curriculum Facilitator Knox, Assistant Principal Bennett also believes that teachers should be vulnerable and take risks in an effort to engage students during instruction.

> Do something different? Even if you think it's really stupid. Like I remember planning lessons when I was in the classroom and thinking this is gonna be so stupid, they're going to laugh, I'm gonna look stupid. And they love it, they be ballin' and laughing, they think it's great. So I think, I think making sure that you're getting students to do something. Get them out of their seat. Try something different and be vulnerable, be creative, just go for it, whatever you say, I'm gonna do it, to just, just do it, be vulnerable and go for it. And find ways to change little stupid things. Like there's ways to give pop quizzes in a different way. I mean, there's 5 billion apps that you can use with students can—so they want to be on their cell phones. They can text in their answers, like I mean there's—I mean, you know, there's so many things that you can change quick that don't take a whole lot. And of course I love the, you know, like I think about Hope King's room and Ron Clark, but of course we love things like that, but everybody can't do a room transformation every week, it's not always realistic. So it's just doing little silly things, you know, to involve students and I think once you engage them once then you'll be hungry for more, which is going to make you want to do more like I gotta do something this week because they're looking forward to me doing some crazy.

Assistant Principal Bennett expressed that students will respond positively when teachers are vulnerable and willing to challenge their creativity. Teachers will be motivated to continue to provide engaging lessons for their students.

Curriculum Facilitator Chyna promotes the incorporation of student discourse as a way that teachers can engage students through instruction:

> So I think a big focus for me when I hear engagement is student discourse around a content. So we've been looking at student discourse or student discussion protocols for them to try out and see if they'll—see if it'll—and it's a process because, you know, when something doesn't work, you automatically want to quit it, but teaching them how to communicate is a process that you have to have them rate themselves and you rate them along the way. But definitely discussion protocols, getting everybody writing at the same time, choosing topics that are relevant to them. Like the—when they did—Barton did point of view, no no no no no, Barton did authors purpose and maybe point of view was a perspective. And she did the Nipsey Hussle. The kids spent like three days looking at, reading articles, looking for words, looking for a word choice to see how does this author—because you can really present it in different ways, so how does this author feel about this topic or this subject looking at the word choice, choosing things that are relevant to them and that are current and that are happening.

Curriculum Facilitator Chyna's comments reveal that if students are participating in discourse around a topic that is relevant to them, engagement and standards-based learning occur.

Principal Chandler provided her staff with targeted professional development to specifically address how teachers can incorporate culturally responsive teaching strategies into instruction to foster student engagement.

> I can't think of one thing specific, like for whole school, but I have taken groups of teachers to Ron Clark Academy in Atlanta, Georgia, where I feel like is the epitome of culture and climate and being able to relate to students through instruction. And so groups of teachers have gone to that professional development and come back and train other teachers on what they saw. Is it difficult to—the experience, it's an experience so it is difficult not to have the experience, but the teachers who went were so fired up that everybody else is wanted to know what happened in Atlanta, and what can I do to get there? So I think that's one big professional development that we've had.

The experience that Principal Chandler's teachers had at the Ron Clark Academy inspired them to engage students through instruction.

Curriculum Facilitator Stanley also believes that students should explore current and relevant topics in order for students to be engaged through instruction.

> I think our ELA teachers and have—and part of it's helpful for the resources as well, of trying to find materials that are relatable to kids. We've—this year we've bought the Scope magazine from Scholastic. It is, and so some of the articles that they've also pulled a couple of our teachers are big fans of news ELA. And so bringing those types of resources that are current and applicable to kids in a teacher's classroom a month or so ago, and they were doing an argument over—it was about tweeting, so kind of bringing in the social media but it was an argument, was this cheating, where one kid had gone and taken the test, and then kind of tweeted some things about the test in between Core 1 and Core 3. And then the argument was that no answers were given, but like, "Hey, you better make sure you know X, Y, and Z." And so I asked was this cheating. So the debate going on of how social media impacts what's morally right, what's not, what it was very timely, and the kids were beyond engaged in that, and there wasn't a right or wrong answer, but it was definitely bringing something in currently to get their attention.

Curriculum Facilitator Stanley believes that students were able to engage in instruction because the topic of the text was pertinent to them.

Principal Chandler proclaims that establishing a school-wide initiative to engage students is an effective strategy to build relationships and maintain a positive school culture. A few years ago, her chorus teacher organized a partnership with the drama department at a local university as a way for all students to be able to participate in a performance of the Lion King.

> The whole school, because not only did you have people acting on the stage, first you had to cast. So that expands it. You have a Cast A and a Cast B. And both were great. So it's not just these kids are talented and can perform, you got two groups. So that expands it to more people. Then you have people who are learning how to do them—who operate all the lights, all the lightings, you had the art class who did all the props, the whole art—all art classes did all the props. You had the family and consumer science teacher doing all the costumes through

> the classes, but the classes. So that to me, that's what I want. I want learning to be school-wide, too. So—and I don't want kids hearing about something cool, that's happening, and they can't be involved.

As Principal Chandler described, relationships developed through a school-wide initiative that engaged all students. The school was portrayed by the media in a positive light and a positive culture was sustained for all stakeholders.

Theme 5: School Leaders Recommend That Teachers Provide Academic Support for Their Students

School leaders recommend that teachers provide academic support for their students. Curriculum Facilitator Chyna believes a teacher can effectively provide academic support for students if they feel safe and if trust is established.

> A lot of times, and a lot of these questions are hard to answer because like some people—well as a mother, this is something that you do, or something that you expect to happen. But the importance of it, sometimes you're their only go-to support system. Sometimes they don't have anyone else to show them right from wrong. Sometimes they don't have anyone else to trust, and you might just be that window of opportunity for them. So I mean, and if I'm not in a safe space, then how can I learn? How can I focus on content? So I think all of that contributes to the importance of a positive relationship.

Curriculum Facilitator Chyna believes that students cannot focus on academics if they do not feel safe and supported.

Assistant Principal Dreux believes student engagement and learning stems from relationships that are developed when students are supported academically.

> So if I have a good relationship with you, then I'm going to be more apt to be engaged, more apt to learn some things, and really, you know, grow in that content area, or just grow as a whole. I'm excited to see what the female student in Ms. S.'s class, science scores are going to be, but she's particularly, I mean,

> she's an EC student, okay. So I'm confident that she's going to pass this test because of who Ms. S. is in her life, you know? So I think that whenever—it's very important that they have these relationships so that that learning, that true learning can take place.

Assistant Principal Dreux feels that students perform well academically when they have positive relationships with their teachers.

Curriculum Facilitator Knox feels that teachers provide academic support for students through data analysis.

> When we look at data, often, I try to encourage teachers to look at their data after every assessment, look at formative and summative assessment data, and then keep data charts for their kids, or at least for their classes to be able to say, on this standard, this is where I'm at and this is where I want to go. So keep data in the forefront, not only for them, but for their kids so that we talk in a data language, and then just imploring different instructional strategies, introducing them to them, and then having them invite me in to see what they're doing and celebrating that.

Examining student data provides teachers with information about how they can provide academic support to their students.

Curriculum Facilitator Chyna shares the same views about academic support and data analysis:

> Okay, so they start by first recognizing where they are. So they do a lot of assessments that come naturally with the America Reading Program Company, company program, so they do the first line of assessment—assessment. They dig deeper by holding one-on-one conferences with them to collect data on what the issue is within the level that they fell on, so if you're a orange reader, what is the issue in the orange reader bucket that you're having a problem with—orange reader level that you're having a problem with? From there trying a range of strategies that they already have in their toolbox. Because every student needs something different and they need it in a different way. So figuring out their learning style, what—how, what way do they learn best? Is it tactile? Is it

> auditory? What do I need to give them? Coming to their resources, me, the APs, coming to figure out if they're not seeing success with the way that—the strategy that they gave them, what else can they give them to work with? And just having a continuous cycle of data analysis, so I've collected my data, this didn't work for the student, what's our next goal, what's our next step.

Assistant Principal Sage believes that a teacher's ability to connect with their students will enable them to provide academic support for their students.

> Okay, so um I'd say Miss M. has a positive relationship with a student named I. I. is suicidal, depression, he has—he's clinical manic depression, you know, he wears the dark clothing. She's the only teacher somehow that has been able to make him smile, the only teacher that has—he actually wants to stay after school to do work, and his math grades have improved and I think it's because of she found a connection with him, because during his regular class, he sleeps a lot. And so, you know, as teachers who just see kids sleeping, they think they lazy, da da da da da, they didn't take time to really find out what's going on, and she instead didn't just push him off, she really just nurtured him and clicked with him, found out what he was interested in, and they connected that way because as it turned out they had a bond there because they were interested in some of the same things, so I've seen that kid kind of turn around because of a teacher going the extra step to build that relationship.

Assistant Principal Sage recognized the effort expended to establish and maintain a positive relationship with a student. The teacher was able to provide academic support resulting from her intentional efforts to connect with the student.

Principal Kynnedy believes giving students access to a rigorous curriculum is a way an administrator can help teachers support students academically.

> And I believe, this is just my belief and if you work at my school you're gonna have to work underneath it, to differentiate within a group this big it's not very easy to differentiate because they're too closely aligned. If you have kids who are a little bit spread out, you're forced to differentiate. So I needed to force differentiation. I also need to enforce opportunity. The diversity, we're a fairly diverse school, people typically think that we're identical to [another high

> school], we're not. We have about 30% African American, about 10% Hispanic, so we're not as White as some people think, we're not as rich as some people think. And so we are a much more diverse school. Sometimes we don't treat it like that. The teachers don't treat it like that because most of all of our kids, whether you're White or Black, or rich or poor, they come in and act like they have some sense about us. And some of my teachers think that if you're Black or poor you must have no sense. And that's not the case. We know that's not the case. I did not have enough representation to work on the gap. So last year, 78% of my minorities were in standard or low-level classes. And this year it's 21%. And really, it should be like 2% because even my eighth graders who are in standard math are in accelerated math. So technically I should say that they're in advanced math class, but there's no difference between eighth-grade math and advanced, so I'll go ahead and leave it that 21% of my—21% of my minorities are in low-level classes, and that's being on grade level, but that means you're low-level class. And so changing that opportunity from where the year before it was 78% down to 21%, tell me how that's not gonna improve my gap. Tell me how that is not going to improve opportunity and access, and my teachers are still railing against it. So my sixth-grade teachers have taught everybody they've either well-qualified to be an A or they're in accelerated math, and so everybody's going to be ready to go to accelerated seventh grade next year, and if they're ready to go to Math 1 by the time they're in eighth grade, they're going to have had the opportunity. If they're not ready, I'm not going to force them because I'm not cruel, I'm not cruel. But if they don't have it in sixth grade, it's harder to get into that that pre-algebra class, and if they're not in pre-algebra, they're not ready for Math 1, so I had to make sure that my seventh grade my kids at least had access to do—to be there.

By restructuring course offerings, teachers allow students to access higher-level curricula, which provide students with advanced educational opportunities in the future.

Principal Kynnedy reviewed the manner in which one of her teachers assisted her students in accessing the higher-level curriculum:

> She's doing targeted interventions, targeted tutoring, so targeted interventions in the classroom, targeted tutoring sessions. She's specifically inviting a group of kind of introverted kids, and another time that's a group of extroverted kids, because the two were not working together. And so I thought that was a really interesting dynamic.

According to Principal Kynnedy's point of view, the teacher uses strategies that will enable students to be successful in advanced classes.

Curriculum Facilitator Stanley believes that in order for students to receive academic support from teachers, students must feel safe, loved, and respected.

> But needing—so that kids can learn, they need to feel safe, they need to feel loved, they need to feel respected. And when those needs aren't met, and they feel that way, then learning can take place. And from there, I think we see it instructionally and in test scores.

Curriculum Facilitator Stanley believes that teachers should meet students' basic needs in order for learning to take place.

Principal Kynnedy believes that when students feel safe, teachers are more effectively able to provide them with academic support.

> It goes back to that safety place that the child will do for you. Because some will not do it otherwise. Some will, some may, but others won't. And they may work in direct contrast with what you want to do just to spite you, just to get under your nerves, just to get that rise. And not necessarily in a manipulative way, and not a conscious way. Some are, but some like me, I was never rude, a teacher would have never said that I was rude, but they would have never seen my potential.

Teacher and student camaraderie is important in order to for an instructional partnership to occur. The relationship between the teacher and student can have a positive or negative effect on the quality and duration of the academic support.

As a former curriculum facilitator, Assistant Principal Bennett believes that the curriculum facilitator should develop relationships with students to be able to help teachers provide students with academic support:

> But I think too in a CF role it's also important to know the kids, and know their strengths and weaknesses, and I think sometimes that's overlooked, like I only need to be here to help teachers, you gotta love students in order to be able to help the teachers, so kind of sharing some of those things, some of those methods that they can do to help bridge the gap between instruction and relationship.

Assistant Principal Sage felt changing a student's class placement enabled the teacher to be able to provide him with academic support.

> Another incident was, another negative relationship, even—where a parent had got involved, this is a different student, different teacher, where he, again, disruptive, and it was the last class of the day, fourth core at the end the day, and I recognized that it's because of his medication was wearing off by the end of the day. So I ch—all I did was change his schedule, made her his second core and from then he hasn't she hasn't she even told me thank you for doing that because he hasn't—she hasn't—she even told me thank you for doing that because he hasn't had any issues in her class since. So it's just—you just kind of have to know the teacher and the student and trying to figure out what would be the best route to handle this situa—whether we're just removing altogether or adjusting his schedule so that, you know, it can be a win-win situation.

By adjusting the student's schedule, the relationship between the teacher and student was restored and the student was able to receive the academic support that he needed.

Principal Kynnedy revealed that her teachers intentionally offer additional time and availability for academic support.

> Another one is just being available and making sure that they let their kids know I am here for you. So being very deliberate. Here is my email address. Here is the Remind app that you can call me on, here is my cell phone. Here is when I'm staying for tutoring, all of those things that the teacher very openly and explicitly says, "I am here for you, my time I am giving to you. The time that we're in class, the time after school, before school, whenever, that I am here for you." So I think they have to be open and willing and very, very outward and very deliberate to say, "I am here for you, your success is what I'm after." So I think that's really important.

Teachers who give their time to provide academic support to their students are showing students that they care.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the findings from my interviews. By coding and analyzing my interview data, I identified the following themes in regard to what school leaders do to effectively foster teacher-student relationships with middle school students.

The roles of school leaders are to:

- Model How to Build Relationships
- Provide Focused Feedback
- Support Teachers Instructionally

School leaders recommend the following strategies:

- Teachers Engage in Self Reflection
- Teachers Care About Their Students
- Teachers Use Strategies to Build Relationships
- Teachers Engage Students Through Instruction
- Teachers Provide Academic Support for Their Students

In Chapter V, I revisit my research questions and answer them with my findings. I also connect my findings to existing research that I initially discussed in Chapter II, including literature related to school culture, teacher-student relationships, and culturally responsive teaching and leadership practices. I conclude the chapter with implications, what I learned from the study, what the school leaders learned from the study, and what

the district can learn from the study. My recommendations and next steps are followed by a description of my vision for my future.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Existing literature illustrates that more school leaders have intentionally recognized the importance of having the support of all of the members of the school community to build cultures rich with student achievement, staff morale, positive teacher-student relationships, and support from community members (Fiore, 2000; Henderson & Mires, 2011). School leaders have to support the school community and have roles in helping teachers build relationships with their students. School leaders also have various strategies that they use to help teachers foster positive relationships with their students. Middle school students positively respond to culturally relevant practices. My study revealed how school leaders, regardless of their specific roles, used culturally responsive strategies to help teachers foster positive relationships with their students.

In my study, I interviewed nine school leaders (three principals, three assistant principals, and three curriculum facilitators) to gain an understanding of their roles and the typical strategies they use to help teacher build relationships with their students. I also conducted follow-up interviews with the principals with questions related to culturally responsive practices. The goal of my study was to formulate a toolkit of strategies that school leaders can use to help teachers build relationships with their students. As a current assistant principal, a former curriculum facilitator, and an aspiring principal, I was interested in identifying strategies that I can promote to teachers to build

their capacity in establishing relationships with their students. I used a coding process to analyze the data collected from my interview participants and identify main themes. The literature review, coupled with the data analysis and coding process, allowed me to expand my knowledge base of various strategies school leaders use to help teacher build relationships with their students.

In this Chapter V, I begin by analyzing my findings. To do so, I examine my findings in light of existing research, with a particular emphasis on literature related to culturally responsive leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016). I conclude by discussing implications of my study and recommendations for future actions and research.

Analysis

My research question was, *What do school leaders do to foster positive teacher-student relationships with middle school students?* The answer to my research question constituted in two parts: Roles of School Leaders in Fostering Positive Teacher-Student Relationships with Middle School Students, and Leadership Strategies for Effectively Fostering Teacher-Student Relationships.

Part I: Roles of School Leaders in Fostering Positive Teacher-Student Relationships in Middle Schools

Each of the school leaders interviewed held the role of either Principal, Assistant Principal, or Curriculum Facilitator. From my findings, the school leaders believe that in order to effectively foster teacher-student relationships, they should model how to build relationships, provide focused feedback, and support teachers instructionally. Prior research also supports my findings as indicated throughout the various sections.

Model how to build relationships. The school leaders whom I interviewed believed that their role was to model how to build relationships for the teachers and students they serve. All of the school leaders mentioned modeling, or coaching, as a way to assist in this effort. What all of the leaders believe that they should model is an example of shared vision. Kilmann et al. (1986) define organizational culture as "the shared philosophies, ideologies, values, assumptions, beliefs, expectations, attitudes, and norms that knit a community together" (p. 89). When all the leaders of the organization share the same belief that teacher-student relationships are important to building a positive school culture, that vision is modeled for all of the stakeholders. Culturally responsive school leaders have the responsibility of promoting a vision for inclusive instructional and behavioral practices (Khalifa et al., 2016). Modeling is the way that school leaders develop a culturally responsive school environment (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). Creating a culturally responsive school environment is a collaborative effort between school leaders and teachers (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Assistant Principal Sage had a profound statement in regard to being able to learn from other educators in the building as a way of modeling how to build relationships:

> So like D . . ., he is beyond, I can't even really—I really think he's the angel in the sky, honestly, he's one of those type of people, he's—I mean because he is a pastor as well, and I don't know how we ended up with this man, but he's—yeah, we definitely know that. But in terms of supporting me, so I support him as his math supervisor. But when it comes to leadership being in school because he already has—he's a doctor, doctor, he already got—been there, done that, he's been a professor at Bennett College for a number of years. He's been a math department chair. So this man is like, like, you know, I don't know, he's amazing, so when it comes to me building who I am as a leader, he—I go to him. But we know how to go back and forth in our roles with one another, so I can submit to him, but he also can submit to me, and so there's never been a power

> struggle between the two. I never felt intimidated by him. He's never felt intimidated by me.

School leaders model how to build relationships in various ways. When school leaders are aware of strained relationships between a teacher and a student, they offer strategies to the teacher that the school leader has used when interacting with the student. School leaders model how to build relationships with adults as a way to model for teachers how to build relationships with their students. School leaders model how to build relationships by being an advocate for student equity by ensuring that students have access to learning opportunities. Khalifa et al. (2016) believe that culturally responsive leaders challenge exclusionary policies, teachers, and behaviors. Examining self-reflections and examining one's own personal biases is an additional way to model how to build relationships because is displays to teachers and students that the school leader is a lifelong learner and is committed to learning and gaining cultural knowledge (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). Two school leaders from my study mentioned that being transparent to teachers about their roles is a way to model building relationships because it establishes trust between all stakeholders. My participants offered additional ways to model how to build relationships, which included having positive daily interactions with staff and students, serving as a positive role-model, knowing the names of all of their students, and explicitly teaching skills on how to interact with others and deal with tough situations.

Provide focused feedback. Providing focused feedback is another role all of the school leaders play in helping to foster relationships between teachers and students. Trach (2014) states,

> Effective instructional coaching requires well-tuned relationships and dynamic conversations between principals and teachers that result in professional renewal. The goal is to build teacher capacity, thereby improving individual educators, instructional teams, and the entire school over time. In the process, educators work together to analyze patterns, with the coach providing meaningful feedback to help teachers sustain instructional growth. The coaching relationship is both transformational and reciprocal, benefitting the coach and teacher alike. Instructional coaching is an authentic instructional relationship, where each partner is professionally transformed and ultimately renewed each time they engage with one another about teaching and learning. (p. 13)

When school leaders provide teachers with focused feedback, their professional capacity increases. Prior research suggests that developing teacher capacities for culturally responsive pedagogy is the responsibility of culturally responsive leaders (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000; Voltz, Brazil, & Scott, 2003). Similarly, Principal Chandler from my study empowers her teachers by having members on her instructional team share feedback with their various departments from needs assessments and walkthroughs. She explained,

> We've chosen teachers based on data that we need to go in as a team to see and create plans. We made that the culture of the school, we created a purpose, we told them in the beginning, this is a team approach, we want to expand the leadership.

School leaders also provide feedback to teachers in various ways. Two school leaders from my study like to provide initial feedback in order for teachers to focus on

one specific area of improvement. One school leader likes to participate in class activities as a way to provide immediate feedback to teachers from the lens of the students. Two school leaders actually solicit feedback from teachers as a way for them to practice personal self-reflection and continue to be a lifelong learner. Three school leaders preferred for specific feedback to come directly from the principal or assistant principal based on their role, and relationship if the teacher has an issue with professionalism, rather than instruction.

Supporting teachers instructionally. School leaders believe that supporting teachers instructionally is purposeful and meaningful in order to help teachers and students build positive relationships. Hall and Hord (2006) stated, "When building a dynamic learning culture is the focus, schools get better achievement from students" (p. 46). School leaders from my study provide instructional support in a multitude of ways. Participants help support teachers instructionally by assisting them with lesson planning and pacing. One school leader believes that proper planning helps to improve student behavior and academics. Beginning Teacher support was a passion of one of the school leaders. One participant intended to provide direct support to teachers based on their content by having two curriculum facilitators, one for reading and one for math.

Khalifa et al. (2016) cite Skria et al. (2004), stating, "Using school data to see cultural gaps in achievement, discipline, enrichments, and remedial services" (p. 1283) is a behavior of a culturally responsive school leader. One participant from my study assists teachers with data analysis as a way to support teachers instructionally. Effective use of data helps teachers develop plans to help students achieve goals. One principal

supports teachers instructionally by allocating resources for field trips and authentic experiences for students. In order to support teachers instructionally, another leader shares the same love and passion for students. She wants to see students become successful just as much as the teacher. Principal Douglas believes that the way he can support teachers instructionally is to allow teachers to seek and attend professional development that will help them to achieve their instructional goals. He explained,

> So I really allow teachers to find out what they need. Now, that gets me in trouble in that there's some teachers who fall through the cracks, right? There's some teachers who don't get any professional development—I say professional development, I'm thinking of more global professional development. There's always professional development in the school building, right. But, you know, things that are specific, I try to really, I always put money aside for teachers to go to conferences, and I don't assign it, right? Like you come and ask me like, I want to go to this this cool conference in Georgia that's on service learning. Alright, cool. Here you go, you know, I'll approve it, go to it. Because I think that each person is individual and they gotta figure out what their needs are to be able to reach their potential.

Khalifa et al. (2016) would no doubt support Dr. Douglas's allocation of resources to attend trainings because one of the behaviors of culturally responsive leaders is to create culturally responsive PD opportunities for teachers.

Part II: Leadership Strategies for Effectively Fostering Teacher-Student Relationships

School leaders offer several strategies to help foster positive teacher-student relationships with middle school students. Through our discussions, five themes emerged. The five themes were Teachers engage in self-reflection, Teachers care about their students, Teachers use strategies to build relationships, Teachers engage students through instruction, and Teachers provide academic support for their students.

Teachers engage in self-reflection. According to Khalifa et al. (2016), culturally responsive school leaders need to have an awareness of self and his/her values, and dispositions when it comes to serving students. This is also called critical self-awareness or critical consciousness, and is the first aspect of culturally responsive leadership as coined by Khalifa et al. (2016). Leaders must have this understanding in order to create an environment of learning for all children. Cooper (2009) and Shields (2010) believe that educational leaders who critically self-reflect about their biases and their practice are integral to both transformative and social justice leadership.

It is the responsibility of school leaders, then, to establish a culture that allows for teachers, as well as students, to practice critical self-reflection, which is a practice that the school leaders in my study mentioned several times. In order to build teacher capacity, Principal Kynnedy believes in making teachers aware of areas for growth and allows teachers to reflect on the changes that will help them to grow.

> So that it's talking about what is a really proficient teacher. What—how do I need to build your capacity? Do you recognize in a very open way where you need to grow on. So we have teacher admin data meetings every other week. We do grade level once a week or every other week and alternating with teacher admin. And that's an opportunity where I really get to sit down with a team of teachers, the math, language arts, science, and social studies and we talk about how are you communicating with parents? How—what is your discipline issues going on? So I do a lot of coaching in there, so that they know that my expectation is, first you've got to have tight classroom management, and all those things, and if you recognize that if something's not working with a kid, because I keep hearing his name every other week, then I'm asking you to change, and so I'm starting to point out things that they need to change as an admin—as a teacher to do that, or just talk about how they communicate with parents or how they're communicating their grading things. So building that capacity is that awareness of are you doing everything that you think you can do? Because we always say "I've done everything I can do." Probably not accurate.

Other school leaders from my study revealed other strategies to help teachers engage in self-reflection. One school leader reiterated school-wide expectations, looking at trends, and bringing awareness of that data to teachers as ways of engaging teachers in self-reflection. Two participants like to highlight areas of improvement for teachers as a way to shed light to their interactions with students. School leaders want teachers to self-reflect on their own shortcomings and show grace with students. One school leader recommends that teachers observe the interactions that other colleagues have with their students as a way for them to self-reflect on their interactions with a particular student. Two participants present data in team meetings as a way for teachers to practice self-reflection. One school leader uses a teacher evaluation instrument as a reflection tool.

Importantly, two school leaders from my study encourage teachers to reflect on the language they use with students. They want teachers to focus on using positive language versus deficit language with their students. According to Flessa (2009), resisting deficit images of students and families is a characteristic of culturally responsive leadership. One participant likes to help teachers practice self-reflection by helping teachers talk through situations and offering their support. Two school leaders encourage self-reflection in order for teachers to be more culturally sensitive and show compassion for students. The last two strategies that participants shared to help teachers engage in self-reflection were to hold courageous conversations and practice administrator self-reflection so that they can be aware of their own biases and serve as a reflection tool for teachers and students.

Teachers care about their students. Culturally responsive school leaders create welcoming spaces, caring community, and learning spaces (Khalifa et al., 2016). Khalifa et al.'s (2016) fourth aspect of a culturally responsive leader is the ability of school leaders to engage students, families, and communities in culturally appropriate ways. The school leaders in my study believe one way to engage students in culturally appropriate ways is for teachers to show students they care about them. Teachers can show they care about their students by taking time to talk and listen to students individually and collectively. Some examples include talking and listening to students through small group discussions, student reactions to current events, discussion at informal times such as lunch and class transitions, or conversations through soft reprimands that are administered quietly and privately to students who exhibit inappropriate behavior (Morganett, 1991). Assistant Principal Bennett's story about how a teacher creates a safe space for students as a way to show students he cares about them was intriguing to me.

> Mr. C., yeah, but—and he plays two roles, he plays a good role because he does way too much for kids. Like he'll sit and mediate a group of 15 girls for 3 hours, like nobody else in the world wants to do that, ever, but he loves it, it like feeds his spirit. On the bad side, I won't say bad side, but on the side that we have a challenge with is that students always want to go to him. So ISS is not supposed to be a good place. But sometimes it ends up being a kid's safe place, they want to go to ISS to be with Mr. C.

The teacher that Assistant Principal Bennett described created a safe and caring environment and spent extra time to ensure that strained relationships amongst peers are

restored. Nurturing and caring for others is characteristic of culturally responsive leadership (Gooden, 2005; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012).

School leaders from my study shared other ways that teachers show that they care about their students. One administrator believes that developing good relationships with all the members in a student's family is a way to show students that they care. Two school leaders believe that a teacher shows that they care about their students by creating a safe learning environment. Two participants believe that a teacher can show students they care about them through intentional relatability, asking about their life beyond the classroom, and attending their extracurricular events. Setting high expectations is a way one school leader believes that a teacher shows students that they care about them. Lastly, one participant believes that a teacher can show that they care about students by forming community partnerships and securing resources in the community.

Teachers use strategies to build relationships. The third aspect of culturally responsive leadership, according to Khalifa et al. (2016), is that school leaders promote culturally responsive and inclusive school environments. Culturally responsive school leaders create a welcoming school environment for all stakeholders (Madhlangobe, 2009). In a study by Madhlangobe (2009), one principal in the study believed that her modeling of cultural responsiveness enabled her to "transform attitudes and convince teachers to embrace new teaching approaches that were inclusive and empowering to students, especially students of color" (p. 236).

The school leaders in this current study believe that teachers should use strategies to build relationships with their students. A new teaching approach, House Systems, was

implemented at one of the schools in my study. The house system is an approach where all the stakeholders (staff and students) in the school were divided into "houses" and participated in various activities that promoted inclusivity and established a "family" atmosphere. Curriculum Facilitator Knox spoke to the establishment of a house system as a school-wide relationship building strategy.

> I first—I think our first big push was through the house system. So when we—each student was able to play a little game so that they could know what house they would be in, and so we built camaraderie through our house colors and competition and stuff like that. And I think with that we've had basketball games with house versus house, and we're coming up on a kickball game that we'll do right before testing with the different houses, so we've had different competitions, and then each house has a service learning project that they were working on.

The house system was a way to have friendly competition and positive relationships, which, as indicated by Curriculum Facilitator Knox, is an age-appropriate strategy to use with middle school students. According to Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012), building relationships is a characteristic of culturally responsive leadership.

The school leaders in my study were eager to share many relationship-building strategies that they use and suggest to teachers to build relationships with their students. One school leader believes that simple gestures like greeting students at the door and smiling helps to build relationships. Finding what motivates students is one strategy a participant suggests to build relationships. Establishing a warm and inviting physical classroom environment is the key to several teachers' establishment of positive relationships. One school leader likes to highlight student accomplishments on social media in order to positively market the school, build relationships with parents, and form

partnerships with community organizations. One principal specifically highlighted the use of culturally responsive strategies and making personal connections when building relationships students.

Teachers engage students through instruction. Student engagement is an example of an academic motivational resource, which serves as a gateway to learning and deters students from negative academic outcomes (Skinner et al., 2016). The second aspect of culturally responsive leadership is the ability of school leaders to articulate a vision that supports the development and sustaining of culturally responsive teaching (Khalifa et al., 2016). School leaders have the critical role of ensuring that teachers are and remain culturally competent. This is achieved by the following: recruiting and retaining culturally responsive teachers, securing culturally responsive resources, and offering professional development around culturally responsive practices (Khalifa et al., 2016).

The school leaders in my study believe that teachers should engage students through instruction. Curriculum Facilitator Knox shared how a teacher stepped out of his or her comfort zone in order to engage students through instruction:

> Yes. So one teacher I went to was Ms. G., she's our reading impact teacher and I went in her room and she was doing stations. And one thing that I really loved about that Ms. G. does not like stations, she was like no, that's not for me, that's not what this class is set up for. But I challenged her, Ms. H. and I both challenged her to try stations and this was our first time trying it. They were flawless, her stations were flawless. I happened to go into her sixth-grade group and she had three independent student stations and one teacher-led station. And her teacher-led station the kids were going through word fluency and she was boosting them up, praising them for their celebrations from last week on the number of words, recognitions, they've increased. And then she had one group of students, they were doing a reading selection on—it was, she at one reading

> selection on Nicki Minaj, one on Cardi B, the third one, well the third one they had to compare and contrast the compare and contrast the two artists, and then they got to write a statement to say which artist that they prefer and why.

According to Curriculum Facilitator Knox, the students will forever have a memory of that culturally responsive lesson, especially with the lesson planned by that particular teacher who happened to be an experienced White female. Sleeter (2012) and Villegas and Lucas (2002) believe that culturally responsive leaders help teachers to engage and reform the school curriculum to become more culturally responsive.

There were many additional engagement strategies suggested by the school leaders in my study. Two participants mentioned the incorporation of student interests during a lesson as an engagement strategy that teachers use with their students. One leader mentioned that teachers form community partnerships and the incorporation of guest speakers as a way to engage students through instruction. Another participant likes for her teachers to use culturally relevant resources such as song lyrics and text with characters like themselves as a way to engage students through instruction. One school leader explains to teachers that the incorporation of different personal experiences and perspectives is a culturally relevant strategy and a way to engage students through instruction. Another participant believes in the power of being vulnerable and taking risks in order to engage students through instruction, as she feels it will serve as a "cliffhanger" for students. Student discourse around current topics of interest were two school leaders' favorite strategies for teachers to incorporate to help engage students. Providing opportunities for classroom discussion is another way that caring teachers engage their students. Teachers can spark classroom discussion by posing questions and

inviting speakers into the classroom to activate discussions and spark interest and enthusiasm is an effective strategy (Glasser, 1998). Lastly, one principal intentionally provides targeted professional development that focuses on culturally relevant instructional practices so teachers are equipped with the capacity to engage students through instruction.

Teachers provide academic support for their students. School leaders in my study believe that teachers should provide academic support for their students. Academic support is shown toward students in various ways. Students state that support from teachers took on various forms, such as "giving them advice, helping them with learning tasks, and assisting with more abstract, global issues such as exploring possible goals and career options" (McHugh et al., 2013, p. 22). The fourth aspect of culturally responsive school leadership is engaging students and parents in community contexts (Khalifa et al., 2016). Academic support can come in the form of creating community partnerships. Principal Chandler affirms that teachers show care for their students by involving the student in the larger community and forming partnerships.

> That goes back to me, it goes back to the school culture is bigger than in the school building, it's community, it's volunteers, partnerships. I'm one person, but me times 70 others talking to people in the community about the great things at this school times the students and their parents and most of them have two parents and they have a grandma and they have an auntie and an uncle, so.

Principal Chandler described care shown for students throughout the greater community, and that resources are available for students beyond school walls. In concert with the perspectives of Gardiner and Enomoto (2006), Johnson (2006), and Walker (2001), an

aspect of culturally responsive leadership is developing meaningful positive relationships with the community.

School leaders from my study suggest the following strategies as ways that teachers can show academic support for their students. Three school leaders believe that effective academic support can be provided by the teacher for the student if students feel safe and trust their teacher. One participant believes in examining student data as a way to provide academic support for their students. Making connections with students is one way a teacher can show academic support for their students. Gooden (2005), Khalifa (2012), and Lomotey (1993) believe that culturally responsive leaders are well-versed in connecting with their students. Academic supports from teachers are needed when students are provided access to rigorous and challenging courses, as one school leader believes. Another participant believes that a change in placement or schedule is a way to help teachers support students academically. One school leader is certain that time is essentially the most important way a teacher can support a student academically.

Implications

My Practical Guidelines: Roles and Strategies

I gleaned much from the school leaders in my study. Initially, I just generally wanted to know what school leaders did to foster positive teacher-student relationships. I wanted to hear from school leaders (principal, assistant principal, and curriculum facilitator) in regard to how to help teachers in their particular roles. Each person in a leadership role has a different written job description; however, they work toward the same goals. I learned that many of my participants served in different leadership

positions during their career, which have all helped them in their current roles. I chose to report my findings in two categories—roles and strategies. From there, my own practical guidelines emerged.

In regard to roles of the leadership team in fostering positive teacher-student relationships with middle school, the school leaders (principal, assistant principal, and curriculum facilitator) from my study model how to build relationships for teachers and students, provide focused feedback to teachers and students, and support teachers instructionally. This is depicted in a hierarchical chart in Figure 1, which illustrates what each school leader should do to foster positive teacher-student relationships (answer to the research question).

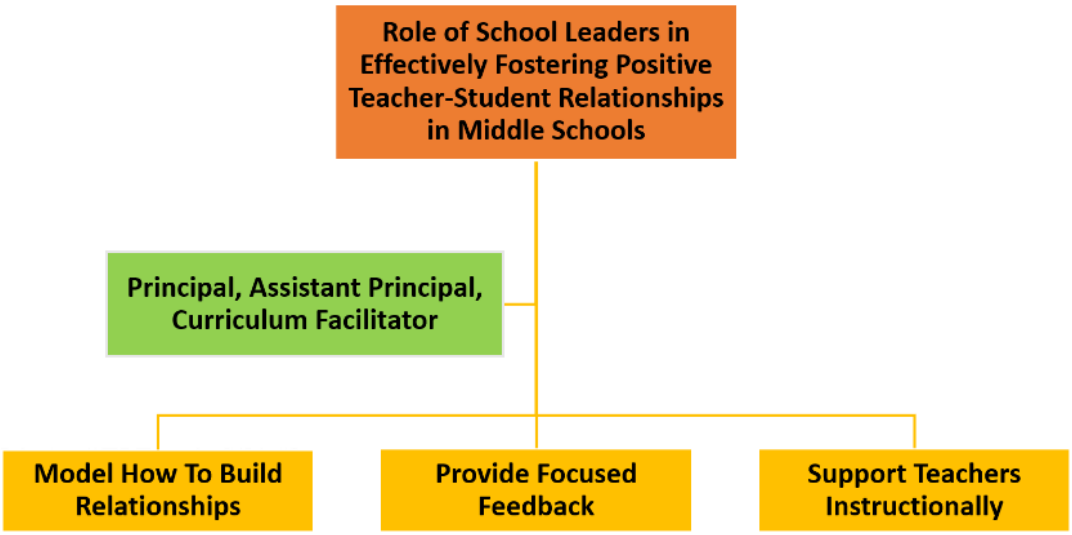

Figure 1. Leadership Roles in Effectively Fostering Positive Teacher-Student Relationships with Middle School Students.

I was very interested in identifying strategies from school leaders in order to develop a toolkit for teachers on how to build relationships with their students. This

toolkit could serve as a reference if they are having a strained relationship with a student. From my conversations with school leaders, the concepts of *self-reflection, care, relationship building strategies, engagement, and academic support* were mentioned most frequently by all of the school leaders. To form my own understanding of how the concepts can assist teachers, I arranged them in an order that would move teachers through a process in order to best help them build, maintain, or restore relationships with students. I have titled this process **Practical Guidelines: Teacher-Student Relationships Protocol.** The process is illustrated in a map that that I have displayed in Figure 2.

When teachers have a strained relationship with a student, they should immediately *self-reflect* on the situation to be sure that they have no implicit bias or beliefs that are hindering the relationship. This should initiate the thinking process about why the relationship is strained and what could be done to restore it. This process serves as a catalyst for the teacher to *care* about the relationship that they have with the student. Once an element of care is established, teachers can develop and intentionally implement *relationship building strategies* in order to relate to and establish a connection with their students. When relationship building strategies are implemented, teachers will begin to learn more about student interest and motivation. The teacher should incorporate student interest into their lesson to promote student *engagement* during instruction. Once students are engaged in the lesson, teachers should provide *academic support* for their students. All of the components of the **Practical Guidelines: Teacher-Student**

Relationships Protocol aid in establishing and sustaining positive teacher-student relationships with their middle school students.

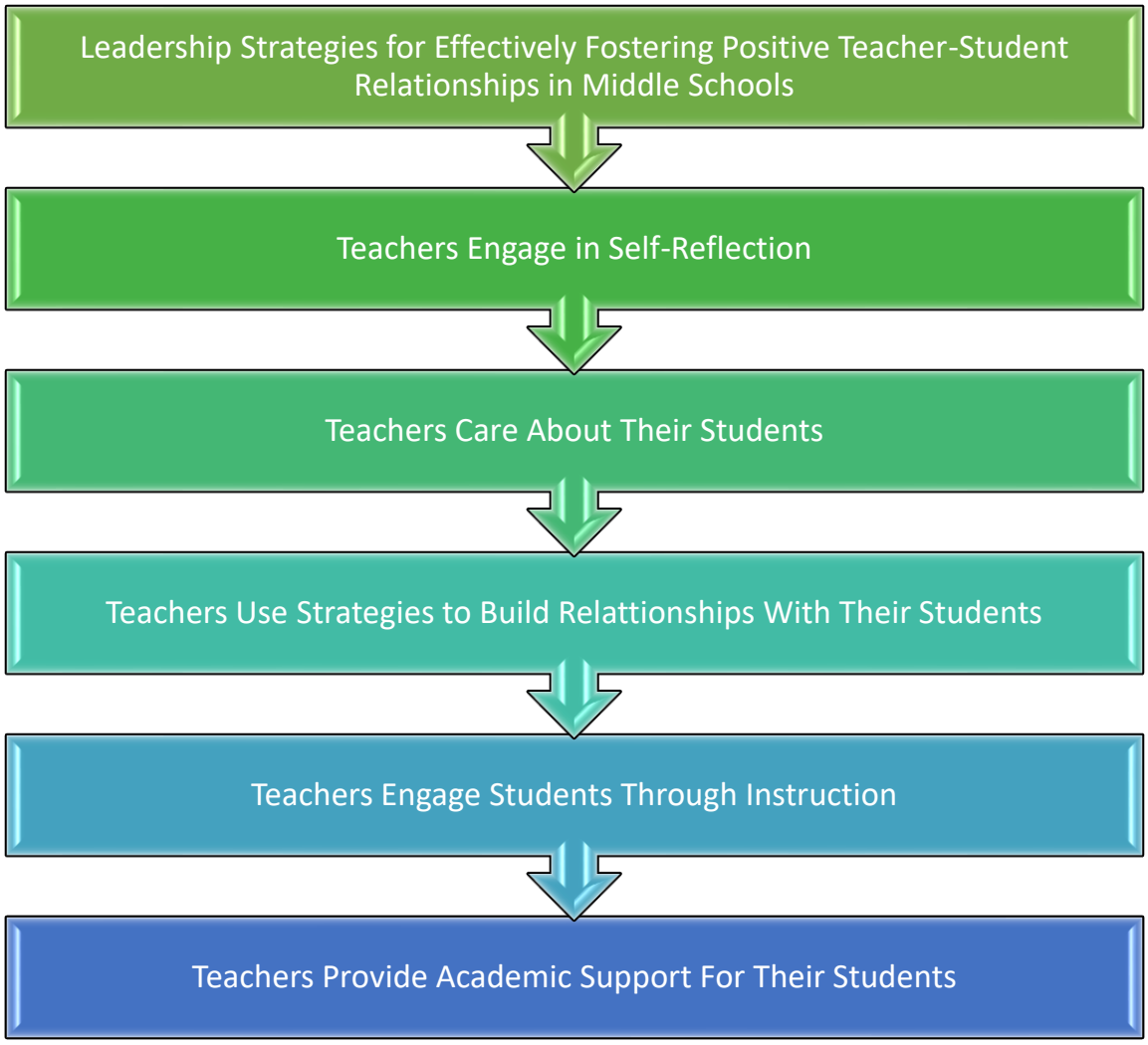

Figure 2. Practical Guidelines: Teacher-Student Relationships Protocol.

After a detailed analysis of all of the findings from my interview participants, I also created the **Teacher-Student Relationships Strategies Toolkit**, which is listed in Figure 3. Each of the strategies listed was drawn directly from the findings data. This

toolkit is to be used in conjunction with the **Practical Guidelines: Teacher-Student Relationships Protocol** to help teachers foster positive relationships with their students.

Self-Reflection Strategies	Crucial conversations
	Cultural sensitivity reflection
	Equity and implicit bias training
	Focus on positive vs. deficit language
	Grade level meetings on data trends
	Highlight misconceptions of student behavior
	Reference teacher evaluation tool

Care Strategies	Attend students' extra-curricular activities
	Create a safe space for students
	Form community partnerships
	Hold students accountable
	Practice intentional relatability
	Provide resources to student and families
	Set high expectation for students

Relationship Building Strategies	Determine what motivates students
	Highlight students on social media
	Implement a school-wide "house" system
	Create inviting physical classroom environment
	Provide academic support for students
	Use culturally responsive strategies to build relationships and engage students through instruction.

Engagement Strategies	Explore current and relevant topics to students
	Form community partnerships
	Incorporate student discourse in lesson
	Integrate student interest in instruction
	Take risks, step out of comfort zone, and be vulnerable to engage students through instruction

Academic Support Strategies	Assess to rigorous and advanced curriculum
	Make changes in class placement
	Develop safe and trusting relationships
	Have data conversations with students
	Make connections with students
	Provide culturally responsive resources
	Give time to effectively support students

Figure 3. Teacher-Student Relationships Strategies Toolkit.

What I Learned from the Study

The execution of this study was both a learning and confirmation opportunity. I think I am naturally a relationship builder. I position myself in a way that makes me accessible, relatable, and visible to all staff and students. Building relationships comes naturally for me, and I think it is one of the main reasons that I feel that I have been a successful school leader as measured by feedback from parents, staff, and previous supervisors. I am extremely reflective in practice and I am a lifelong learner. In my work, I have also realized that building relationships does not come naturally to others. Some people have to work hard to make connections with others who are different. I have also felt that teachers who have the best relationships with students yield the greatest results, and my study has confirmed this hunch with concrete findings and confirms prior research. I have learned to continue to look through a culturally responsive lens in all aspects of my practice to ensure that relationships are perpetual. School culture must be positive in order for learning to occur; relationships are a critical aspect of school culture.

What the School Leaders Learned from the Study

In many of the debriefing sessions following my interviews, the school leaders in the study stated that they appreciated the conversation and expressed that it serves as a reflection tool in regard to the school culture and teacher-student relationships at their schools. The school leaders also learned to look at aspects of school culture through a culturally responsive lens. The majority of the participants have not had specific professional development on the topics of implicit bias and culturally responsive teaching and leadership practices; they just do what is good for kids. The school leaders recognized that the majority of the staff were not well-versed in that area. Culturally responsive practices were an area for growth for all the leaders and are needed due to the diverse populations that they serve. Khalifa et al.'s (2016) research suggests that effective school leaders understand that they need to recruit and sustain teachers who are culturally responsive and able to work with all children. Providing leverage for teacher growth in that area is imperative as a leader wants to maintain a positive school culture and environment.

What the District Could Learn from the Study

I think the district will learn that even though the majority of the training on implicit bias and culturally relevant practices were initiated at the district level, the majority of school staff (school leaders included) need more training in this area. The district should also work with local colleges and universities on training pre-service teachers on culturally responsive teaching and leadership practices due to this lack of training. Touré (2008) recommends that educational programs reexamine requirements

of the teacher and school leader programs, which lack an emphasis on culturally responsive practices knowledge or issues of social justice. Beginning teachers and school leadership programs at the district level should place an emphasis on culturally responsive practice as well. This study can start conversations around culturally responsive practices, and how to help foster positive teacher-student relationships. District leaders can learn how to support leadership teams as they work to foster relationships at the school level. The district can also implement my **Practical Guidelines: Teacher-Student Relationships Protocol**, and suggested leadership strategies toolkit in conjunction with culturally responsive practices professional development as a way to build teacher capacity in the area of teacher-student relationships.

Recommendations and Next Steps

My basic qualitative research study aimed at answering the question, *What do school leaders do to foster positive teacher-student relationships with middle school students?* After the execution of my study, I was able to gather compelling insights. A summary of my recommendations are as follows:

- School leaders (Principal, Assistant Principal, Curriculum Facilitator) work in cohesion to foster teacher-student relationships.
- School leaders model how to build relationships, provide focused feedback, and support teacher instructionally to foster teacher-students relationships.

- Professional Development should be provided on culturally responsive teaching and leadership practices at the pre-service, district, and school level for all staff.

In conjunction with culturally responsive teaching and leadership practices and professional development, the **Practical Guidelines: Teacher-Student Relationships Protocol** is a tool for school leaders to use to help teachers foster relationships with their students.

- Protocol should be implemented at the pre-service, district, and school level to serve as a framework for fostering and sustaining positive teacher's student relationships.
- Suggested strategies from the **Teacher-Student Relationship Strategies Toolkit** will be provided to all staff members along with training on how to effectively implement the **Practical Guidelines: Teacher-Student Relationship Protocol.**

In regard to my recommendation of school leaders working together to foster positive teacher-student relationships, it is essential that all schools support the vision of school culture that is established. Khalifa et al. (2016) reiterate that it is a joint effort in creating a culturally responsive school environment. School leaders create welcoming spaces and caring learning communities.

In regard to my recommendation of providing culturally responsive professional development at various levels for all staff, is it clear from the findings that all staff need more training in this area to be able to meet the needs of all students. Khalifa et al.

(2016) believe that all educators should be prepared to operate successfully in the 21st century and adapt to the changing demographics of students.

Lastly, in regard to my recommendation of implementing the **Practical Guidelines: Teacher-Student Relationship Protocol** and **Teacher-Student Relationship Strategies Toolkit** I developed through my findings, staff will have a tangible vehicle that they can use when faced with a strained relationship. Robinson (2010) believes that "school leaders develop effective processes and strategies that successfully reform their schools because they sincerely love all children and they believe all children are capable of learning, if given an equal opportunity to excel" (p. ii).

As educational leadership studies continue to emerge, I hope that school leaders will continue to be culturally responsive and use the findings to help all teachers and students reach their full potential.

My Vision for My Future

As a young, intelligent, passionate school leader, I believe that my future is bright! I plan to continue to increase my professional capacity because I am eager to learn and love to see my students experience success. I have had the fortunate opportunity to serve as a curriculum facilitator where I experienced success. I was extremely proud to assist a staff in helping increase a school's proficiency from 49.7% to 60% in a 2-year period. I applied my relational skills along with my content knowledge and the school was recognized as one of the districts most improved schools. I wholeheartedly agreed with Assistant Principal Bennett's belief:

> But I think too in a CF role it's also important to know the kids, and know their strengths and weaknesses, and I think sometimes that's overlooked, like I only need to be here to help teachers, you gotta love students in order to be able to help the teachers, so kind of sharing some of those things, some of those methods that they can do to help bridge the gap between instruction and relationship.

Her statement was profound and forms the basis of my leadership style and commitment. I resonated with her and applied that belief as an assistant principal.

My successes catapulted my role as an assistant principal and I put relationships at the forefront of everything I say and do as a leader. I share the same sentiments as Principal Chandler when she proclaimed,

> School culture is impacted by positive student and teacher relationships because the teacher is the—in my opinion and in many research observations, that is the single most important factor for a child, the principal is important but the teacher is the most important person because they get the most face time and they get the most time with the child, with children in the school. So when a child knows that there are adults in the building that they have a positive relationship with, that's just going to increase from room to room to room to room, so if you have a majority of positive people and positive relationships on staff, that's going to impact the whole school culture.

I think that caring is just a part of my nurturing nature. Principal Chandler made a statement about care that really spoke to my heart and soul:

> Sometimes supervisors like that are criticized as being soft or, you know, a pushover. But it's okay for me because I can sleep at night and I can live with it, I care about people. And I'm okay with that. They can—that's, that's fine.

I believe in the power of mentorship and modeling appropriate interaction between teachers and students. Discipline is one of the main responsibilities of my job and it is definitely not my favorite. I believe that positive relationships and engaging

instruction are the remedies because ultimately students need to be learning. I use every discipline incident as a teaching opportunity for both the teacher and students in hope that the relationship is restored and repaired. The goal is success for all, including myself.

I was able to view the movie "Hidden Figures" and was emotional throughout the movie. The plight of the African American women in the movie hit too close to home. Not only was "Hidden Figures" a true story and the women in the movie were members of my sorority (Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated), I related wholeheartedly with their plight and their desire to be acknowledged for their academic intellect, visions, professionalism through adversity, and wanting better for themselves and family. I felt that I was a "Hidden Figure." I am pursuing the highest level of academia. I want to complete this journey for all African American women everywhere who want to leave their legacy. I am still on my quest to become a Principal! I want to set my own personal vision for school culture, to be able to help people by providing guidance and offering opportunities. This will happen for me and I will look back on all the adversity I have faced and know that I am strong and persevered through when I wanted to quit, or did not feel adequate enough. I know that I have all the tools to help others and I will continue with my personal mission and brand. The perfect opportunity is coming soon and I will be proud of myself for letting GOD guide my path. Currently, I am AP Smith, the best assistant principal in the world!!! She is ready to conquer the world and continue to change lives. The rest will be history, *Kenya's Story . . .!*

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APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

Research Question

How do school leaders foster positive teacher-student relationships with middle school students?

Introductions, purpose of interview, anonymity

The school leader will be informed of the purpose of the interview, the topic to be covered, and assured confidentiality about all information shared.

Sample verbiage: Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today to talk about your thoughts regarding the principal's role in fostering positive teacher-student relationships with middle school students. You will be interviewed as part of my doctoral study. Everything that you share with me will be confidential. I will not share any information with staff members or other school leaders. I will, however, share the information with my committee as necessary for completion of my studies. Your name and the names of others that you mention in the interview will not be used. Any other identifying information will not be used. I would like to record the interview so that I can remember everything you say. Is that acceptable to you? The interview will then be transcribed word by word and a copy will be offered to you. I will make any changes or additions at your request. During the interview, if you feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions, please let me know. I plan for the interview to last approximately 60 minutes but you may stop the interview at any time you would like.

Interview Guide A: Principal Participants

Principal's Demographic Information

I. Gender

II. Age

III. Race/Ethnicity

IV. Educational background

V. Total years as a principal

VI. Number of years in current school

VII. Number of years as principal at current school

VIII. Leadership positions before becoming a principal

Interview Questions

A. How is school culture impacted by positive teacher-student relationships?

B. What is the importance of a teacher having positive supportive relationships with his or her students?

C. What teacher and student behaviors do you perceive contribute most directly to developing and maintaining positive and supportive teacher-student relationships?

D. What do teachers do to develop and maintain positive and supportive relationships with their students?

E. What do you do to help teachers develop and maintain a positive and supportive relationship with a student who appears distant or resistant to positive advances?

F. As principal, what is your main role in helping teachers to foster positive relationships with their students?

G. What do you feel is the assistant principal's role in assisting teachers to foster positive relationships with their students?

H. How do you utilize the assistant principal to help improve a teacher-student relationship that is strained? What are the similarities to your role? What are the differences?

I. What you do feel is the curriculum facilitator's role in assisting teachers to foster positive relationships with their students?

J. How do you utilize the curriculum facilitator to help improve a teacher-student relationship that is strained? What are the similarities to your role? What are the differences

Tenets of Culturally Responsive Teaching Framework Questions

1. *They have high self-esteem and high regard for others.*

    a) How do you help teachers build their capacity?

    b) How do you help your teachers grow as leaders?

    c) How do you help teachers examine their implicit bias?

    d) What characteristics do you see in a teacher that has high regard for others?

    e) What characteristics do you see in a teacher that has a high regard for themselves?

    f) How do teachers show students that they care about them?

2. *They see themselves as part of the community; they see teaching as giving back to the community, and they encourage their students to do the same.*
    a) How do you empower teachers to serve in leadership roles?
    b) How do you engage your teachers with the local community?
    c) How does your teachers encourage students to serve their community?
    d) How do your teachers relate to their students?
3. *They see teaching as an art and themselves as artists.*
    a) How do you help teachers tap into their creativity?
    b) How do you support teachers as they develop their own teaching identity?
4. *They help students make connections among their community, national, and global identities.*
    a) How do you build relationships with your teachers?
    b) How do your teachers build relationships with their students?
    c) How do you establish/maintain a school cultures that promotes positive relationships between students and teachers?
5. *They believe that all students can succeed.*
    a) How do your help your teachers support students academically?
    b) How do you help your teachers support students' social development?
    c) How do your help your teachers become emotionally aware and sensitive to the needs of their students?
6. *They see teaching as "digging knowledge out" of students. (pp. 59–84)*
    a) How do you provide instructional support for your teachers?

b) What strategies or methods do teachers use in the classroom to engage their students in instruction?

Concluding Questions

1. Is there anything you would like to add?
2. Anything else you believe I should know?

We are at the conclusion of the questions. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and feelings with me. As I mentioned at the beginning of the interview, you will not be identified in any way with the information you have given me. I will get a copy of the transcribed interview to you so that you may review it and make any changes or additions. Again, thank you for your time.

Interview Guide B: Assistant Principal Participants

Assistant Principal Demographic Information

I. Gender

II. Age

III. Race/Ethnicity

IV. Education background

V. Total years as an assistant principal

VI. Number of years in current school

VII. Number of years as assistant principal at current school

VIII. Leadership positions before becoming an assistant principal

Interview Questions

A. How is school culture impacted by positive teacher-student relationships?

B. What is the importance of a teacher having positive supportive relationships with his or her students?

C. What teacher and student behaviors do you perceive contribute most directly to developing and maintaining positive and supportive teacher-student relationships?

D. What do teachers do to develop and maintain positive and supportive relationships with their students?

E. What do you do to help teachers develop and maintain a positive and supportive relationship with a student who appears distant or resistant to positive advances?

F. As assistant principal, what is your main role in helping teachers to foster positive relationships with their students?

G. What do you feel is the principal's role in assisting teachers to foster positive relationships with their students? What are the similarities to your role? What are the differences?

H. What you do feel is the curriculum facilitator's role in assisting teachers to foster positive relationships with their students?

I. How does the curriculum facilitator help improve a teacher-student relationship that is strained? What are the similarities to your role? What are the differences?

Tenets of Culturally Responsive Teaching Framework Questions

1. *They have high self-esteem and high regard for others.*
    a) How do you help teacher's build their capacity?
    b) How do you help your teachers grow as leaders?
    c) How do you help teachers examine their implicit bias?
    d) What characteristics do you see in a teacher that has high regard for others?

e) What characteristics do you see in a teacher that has a high regard for themselves?

f) How do teachers show students that they care about them?

2. *They see themselves as part of the community; they see teaching as giving back to the community, and they encourage their students to do the same.*

a) How do you empower teachers to serve in leadership roles?

b) How do you engage your teachers with the local community?

c) How does your teachers encourage students to serve their community?

d) How do your teachers relate to their students?

3. *They see teaching as an art and themselves as artists.*

a) How do you help teachers tap into their creativity?

b) How do you support teachers as they develop their own teaching identity?

4. *They help students make connections among their community, national, and global identities.*

a) How do you build relationships with your teachers?

b) How do your teachers build relationships with their students?

c) How do you establish/maintain a school cultures that promotes positive relationships between students and teachers?

5. *They believe that all students can succeed.*

a) How do your help your teachers support students academically?

b) How do you help your teachers support students' social development?

c) How do your help your teachers become emotionally aware and sensitive to the needs of their students?

6. *They see teaching as "digging knowledge out" of students. (pp. 59–84)*

a) How do you provide instructional support for your teachers?

b) What strategies or methods do teachers use in the classroom to engage their students in instruction?

Concluding Questions

1. Is there anything you would like to add?
2. Anything else you believe I should know?

We are at the conclusion of the questions. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and feelings with me. As I mentioned at the beginning of the interview, you will not be identified in any way with the information you have given me. I will get a copy of the transcribed interview to you so that you may review it and make any changes or additions. Again, thank you for your time.

Interview Guide C: Curriculum Facilitator Participants

Curriculum Facilitator's Demographic Information

I. Gender

II. Age

III. Race/Ethnicity

IV. Education background

V. Total years as a curriculum facilitator

VI. Number of years in current school

VII. Number of years as curriculum facilitator at current school

VIII. Leadership positions before becoming a curriculum facilitator

Interview Questions

A. How is school culture impacted by positive teacher-student relationships?

B. What is the importance of a teacher having positive supportive relationships with his or her students?

C. What teacher and student behaviors do you perceive contribute most directly to developing and maintaining positive and supportive teacher-student relationships?

D. What do teachers do to develop and maintain positive and supportive relationships with their students?

E. What do you do to help teachers develop and maintain a positive and supportive relationship with a student who appears distant or resistant to positive advances?

F. As curriculum facilitator, what is your main role in helping teachers to foster positive relationships with their students?

G. What do you feel is the principal's role in assisting teachers to foster positive relationships with their students?

H. How does the principal help improve a teacher-student relationship that is strained? What are the similarities to your role? What are the differences?

I. What you do feel is the assistant principal's role in assisting teachers to foster positive relationships with their students?

J. How does the assistant principal improve a teacher-student relationship that is strained? What are the similarities to your role? What are the differences?

Tenets of Culturally Responsive Teaching Framework Questions

1. *They have high self-esteem and high regard for others.*
    a) How do you help teachers build their capacity?
    b) How do you help your teachers grow as leaders?
    c) How do you help teachers examine their implicit bias?
    d) What characteristics do you see in a teacher that has high regard for others?

e) What characteristics do you see in a teacher that has a high regard for themselves?

f) How do teachers show students that they care about them?

2. *They see themselves as part of the community; they see teaching as giving back to the community, and they encourage their students to do the same.*

a) How do you empower teachers to serve in leadership roles?

b) How do you engage your teachers with the local community?

c) How does your teachers encourage students to serve their community?

d) How do your teachers relate to their students?

3. *They see teaching as an art and themselves as artists.*

a) How do you help teachers tap into their creativity?

b) How do you support teachers as they develop their own teaching identity?

4. *They help students make connections among their community, national, and global identities.*

a) How do you build relationships with your teachers?

b) How do your teachers build relationships with their students?

c) How do you establish/maintain a school cultures that promotes positive relationships between students and teachers?

5. *They believe that all students can succeed.*

a) How do your help your teachers support students academically?

b) How do you help your teachers support students' social development?

c) How do your help your teachers become emotionally aware and sensitive to the needs of their students?

6. *They see teaching as "digging knowledge out" of students. (pp. 59–84)*
   a) How do you provide instructional support for your teachers?
   b) What strategies or methods do teachers use in the classroom to engage their students in instruction?

Concluding Questions

1. Is there anything you would like to add?
2. Anything else you believe I should know?

We are at the conclusion of the questions. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and feelings with me. As I mentioned at the beginning of the interview, you will not be identified in any way with the information you have given me. I will get a copy of the transcribed interview to you so that you may review it and make any changes or additions. Again, thank you for your time.

APPENDIX B

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPALS' SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. How often does your staff meet as a whole staff, PLCs, grade level/departments?

2. What impact has the various meetings have on the instructional practices in your school?

3. Do you solicit feedback from the teachers following the learning opportunities provided to them? If so, how do you go about doing this?

4. Do your teachers use culturally responsive teaching practices during instruction?

5. What professional development supports do you provide your teachers in the area of culturally responsive teaching practices?

6. Do you have an instructional learning team? If so, how do they help support building the capacity of your teachers in the area of culturally responsive teaching practices?

7. How do you monitor if your teachers are using the culturally responsive teaching practices resources, supports, and opportunities that have been given?

8. If your teachers are not using the culturally responsive teaching resources, supports, and opportunities, what are your next steps?

9. What professional development supports do you provide your leadership team (assistant principal/curriculum facilitator) in the area the culturally responsive leadership practices?

10. Tell me a story of a teachers, assistant principal, or curriculum facilitator that has experience success fostering (establishing, building and maintaining) a positive teacher-student relationship as a result of building capacity in the area of culturally responsive practices.

11. Do you have any other strategies to build the capacity of your teachers/assistant principal/curriculum facilitator in the area of culturally responsive teaching practices that you may not have shared?

12. What is your vision for your school in the next 5 years in the area of school culture?

13. How can the use of culturally responsive teaching and leadership practices that foster positive teacher/student relationships contribute to your vision in the area of school culture for the next five years?

14. How can you personally continue to grow in the area of culturally responsive teaching and leadership practice that will help contribute to your vision in the area of school culture for the next five years?

APPENDIX C

CODING CHARTS

Initial Role Codes

Codes	Frequency (# of excerpt coded)
AP Role	10
CF Role	14
Coaching	10
Admin Models How to Build Relationships	22
Modeling	6
Focused Feedback	20
Instructional Support	22
Focus on Instructional Strategies Through Curriculum Support	20
Admin Build Relationships with Teachers	13
Admin Conference with Student	6

Collapsed Codes

- Modeling, Admin Models How to Build Relationships, , Admin Build Relationships With Teachers, Admin Conference With Student, Coaching, CF Role, AP Role
- Focused Feedback
- Instructional Support, Focus on Instructional Strategies Through Curriculum Support

Themes

School leaders (Principal, Assistant Principal, and Curriculum Facilitator) on each of the three leadership teams believe that their role in helping to effectively foster positive teacher-student relationships with middle school students is to do the following:

Model for Teachers How to Build Relationships
Provide Teachers with Focused Feedback
Support Teachers Instructionally

Initial Theme Codes

Codes	Frequency (# of excerpt coded)
Academic Support	26
Administrator Models How to Build Relationships	22
Care	29
Examine Implicit Bias	18
Focused Feedback	20
Relationships Beyond the Classroom	22
Teacher Self-Reflection	23
Culturally Responsive Teaching	20
Engagement	20
Focus on Instructional Strategies Through Curriculum	20
Instructional Support	22
Relationship Building Strategies	36

Collapsed Codes

- Teacher Self-Reflection, Examine Implicit Bias
- Care
- Relationships Beyond the Classroom, Relationship Building Strategies, Admin Models How to Build Relationships
- Culturally Responsive Teaching, Engagement, Focus on Instructional Strategies Through Curriculum, Instructional Support, Focused Feedback
- Academic Support

Themes

School Leaders (Principal, Assistant Principal, and Curriculum Facilitator) recommends the following strategies to effectively foster positive teacher-student relationships with middle school students:

Teachers Engage in Self-Reflection
Teachers Care About Their Students
Teachers Use Strategies to Build Relationships with Their Students
Teachers Engage Students Through Instruction
Teachers Provide Academic Support for Their Students

APPENDIX D

SAMPLE RECRUITMENT E-MAIL

Sample Recruitment Email

Greetings!
My name is Kenya Smith and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I am conducting a research study on school leaders (principals, assistant principals, and curriculum facilitators) who serve middle school students and how they effectively foster (establish, build, and maintain) positive relationships between teachers and students. I am seeking to interview a leadership team (principal, assistant principal, and curriculum facilitator) at a middle school. I am emailing to ask if you would be willing to participate in my study through an interview about your current role. If you select to participate, you will be asked to participate in at least one 1-hour interview. Principals will be asked to participate in a 1-hour follow-up interview. Your name or any other identifiable information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.
Participation is voluntary. If you are willing to participate, or would like additional information prior to making a decision, please reply to this e-mail. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kenya N. Smith
Doctoral Candidate
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

APPENDIX E

IRB INFORMATION SHEET

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

IRB Information Sheet

Project Title: Leadership Strategies for Effectively Fostering Positive Teacher-Student Relationships in Middle Schools

Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor (if applicable): Kenya N. Smith (PI) & Dr. Craig Peck (FA)

What is the all about?

This is a research project. Your participation is voluntary. My study will be a basic qualitative study in which I interview school leaders (principals, assistant principals and curriculum facilitators) of middle schools in an effort to understand the typical strategies used to effectively foster (establish, build, and maintain) positive relationships between teachers and students. Through my analysis of the data, I will make recommendations to school leaders of middle schools of typical strategies they use most often to foster positive teacher-student relationships. These recommendations will be based on the research gathered and the review of the existing literature. You are being asked to participate because you are a school leader (principal, assistant principal, or curriculum facilitator) that serves at a middle school.

Participants will be asked to engage in at least one 1-hour or longer interview. Principals will be asked to participate in a 1-hour or longer follow-up interview. I will also include information about the participants' schools. I intend to examine and report various data points regarding each school setting, including the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, NC School Report Cards, and Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) scores. In particular, I plan to look at and report the areas on the Teacher Working Conditions Survey and NC School Report Cards that specifically focus on school culture and relationships. I am estimating that the document review will take up to 4 hours.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?
Participants will be asked to engage in at least 1 1-hour or more interview. Principals will be asked to participate in a 1-hour or more follow up interview.

How will this negatively affect me?
No, other than the time you spend on this project there are no know or foreseeable risks involved with this study.

What do I get out of this research project?
Participants may benefit from this study to reflect on their current role as school leaders in the respective schools. Participants could also potentially gain and share strategies that future school leaders of middle schools could implement and add to their tool kits after reading my study.

Will I get paid for being in the study?
There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

What about my confidentiality?
All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. To maintain confidentiality, all interview recordings and responses, and transcriptions will be secured in an electronic cloud, UNCG Box. In addition, all participants will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. I will create a master list linking the participants' names to a pseudonym, and this master list will be kept in a locked file cabinet. I will only have asses to the key. All data will be discarded after stored for the appropriate length of time.

What if I do not want to be in this research study?
You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

What if I have questions?
You can ask Kenya Smith (principal investigator) at knsmith9@uncg.edu or Dr. Craig Peck (faculty advisor) at c_peck@uncg.edu anything about the study. If you have any concerns about how you are being treated in this study, please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

APPENDIX F

ADULT CONSENT FORM-IRB

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Project Title: Leadership Strategies for Effectively Fostering Positive Teacher-Student Relationships in Middle Schools

Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor (if applicable): Kenya N. Smith (PI) & Dr. Craig Peck (FA)

Participant's Name: _____

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

What is the study about?
This is a research project. Your participation is voluntary. My study will be a basic qualitative study in which I interview school leaders (principals, assistant principals and curriculum facilitators) of middle schools in an effort to understand the typical strategies used to effectively foster (establish, build, and maintain) positive relationships between teachers and students. Through my analysis of the data, I will make recommendations to school leaders of middle schools of typical strategies the used most often to foster positive teacher-student relationships. These recommendations will be based on the research gathered and the review of the existing literature.

Why are you asking me?
You are being asked to participate because you are a school leader (principal, assistant principal, or curriculum facilitator) that serves at a middle school.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?
Participants will be asked to engage in at least 1 1-hour or more interview. Principals will be asked to participate in a 1-hour or more follow up interview.

Is there any audio/video recording?
Audio recording will be used during interviews. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the recording as described below.

The identity of each participant will be kept confidential by the use of pseudonyms, along with interview recordings, transcriptions, and responses being saved and secured on a password protected computer. Once all data is stored for the appropriate amount of time, all data will be discarded to assure confidentiality.

What are the risks to me?
The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Kenya Smith (principal investigator) at knsmith9@uncg.edu or Dr. Craig Peck (faculty advisor) at c_peck@uncg.edu

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?
My hope is that, through my study's findings, I will be able to provide strategies for educational leaders to help foster positive relationships between teachers and students in

middle schools, as well as contribute to school culture reform through different facets of education such as strategic planning and transforming school cultures.

Are there any benefits to *me* for taking part in this research study?
Participants may benefit from this study to reflect on their current role as school leaders in the respective schools. Participants could also potentially gain and share strategies that future school leaders of middle schools could implement and add to their tool kits after reading my study.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?
There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information confidential?
All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. To maintain confidentiality, all interview recordings and responses, and transcriptions will be secured in an electronic could, UNCG Dropbox. In addition, all participants will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. I will create a master list linking the participants' names to a pseudonym, and this master list will be kept in a locked file cabinet. I will only have asses to the key. All data will be discarded after stored for the appropriate length of time.

What if I want to leave the study?
You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

What about new information/changes in the study?
If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:
By signing this consent form, you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, in this study described to you by Kenya N. Smith.

Signature: _____ Date: _____